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SAINT THOMAS À BECKET

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AIDANUS ELRINGTON, O.P., D.Sc.
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SAINT THOMAS À BECKET

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND EDUCATION OF THOMAS À BECKET

1117—1143

THOMAS à Becket was born in London on December 21st, 1117 or 1118, the day on which the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Apostle whose name he received at baptism. His father was of Norman origin, and his mother a Saracen by birth.[1]

[1] We cannot adopt the opinion of the scholars who, in our days, in England and France, have wished to see in the Saracen origin of Thomas à Becket's mother only a fable derived from popular songs, much later than the Saint's death. The tradition, to which we adhere, has too many witnesses both ancient and modern. On the other hand, it is in our opinion so much identified with the history of Thomas's childhood, that if one wishes to give it up this history must be entirely re-written. It reminds us of those walls which one sometimes sees in an old feudal castle in ruins, at the foot of which a bush has grown whose branches are, as it were, so imbedded in the stone, that they cannot be torn away without the wall itself falling in. The silence, or even the contrary statements—very vague however—of this or that old chronicler of the twelfth century will not shake us. How often do they not contradict each other on other points? And again, writing as they did so soon after St Thomas's death, as panegyrists rather than historians, might they not, out of respect for their hero, have kept silence about a fact, which, in the eyes of his contemporaries, might have done harm to his memory?

Gilbert à Becket belonged to a family of rich merchants of Rouen, but like many of his compatriots he had become an English subject and ranked among the chief citizens of London. Two or three years before the birth of his son, he had taken the Cross, and followed by only one of his servants, had journeyed to the Holy Land.

After praying devoutly at the tomb of our Lord, he was about to re-embark for his adopted country, when he was made prisoner by the infidels, and he and his servant Richard were thrown, with other Christian pilgrims, into the dungeons of an Emir of the country. Amurath—such was his name—used to treat his slaves very harshly. Nevertheless, it was not long before he noticed Gilbert, whose fine countenance and distinguished manners made a most favourable impression, and by degrees he became quite attached to him. He took pleasure in his conversation, and would question him about the manners and customs of Western nations, and more than once invited him to his table.

Amurath had a daughter, a graceful young girl, of a lively and romantic disposition, whose generous soul was naturally disposed to the things of religion. She too was greatly attracted by the good looks and intelligence of the young foreign captive, and she conceived for him an affection, in which was mingled an instinctive sympathy for the worship of the Christians, and a vague presentiment that she was called to embrace their faith. One day she succeeded in conversing with him secretly, and questioned him at length as to their belief and religious practices,

and the nature of the rewards they expected to enjoy in a future life. Gilbert did his best to answer her satisfactorily, whereupon she added: "Would you willingly suffer death for your God, in order to remain faithful to Jesus Christ?" He responded calmly, firmly, and without any hesitation: "I am ready to die for my God." These words made a profound impression on the young girl's heart. Timidly, and as if yielding to an impulse stronger than the reserve which belonged to her age and sex, she declared that she desired to become a Christian, if Gilbert would consent to make her his wife. Fearing some snare, the prisoner kept silence, and left her without replying.

For some time past the Christian slaves had been planning their escape, and seeking means to break their chains. An opportunity occurred: they fled by night, and their measures had been so well taken that they were already far away when the alarm was given by the chief gaoler of the prisons. As soon as she learnt the flight of him she loved, Amurath's daughter, who, since betraying the secret of her heart to the young Englishman without meeting with the desired response, had fallen into a state of melancholy languor, now became a prey to the most violent grief. This inspired her to take an extraordinary resolution. She fled in her turn, and reached the frontier of the country occupied by the Christians. She there met some Englishmen who had some knowledge of her language, and were just sailing for Europe, and persuaded them to take her

with them to their country. "What marvellous courage and devotion," exclaims a Chronicler of the time, from whom we learn these details. "Daughter of a noble race, and heiress to an immense fortune, she sacrificed all the luxury of the paternal mansion; a frail and delicate creature, she confronted poverty, the perils of the sea, a long and distant voyage, without any certainty of shaking the determination of the free man, when she had failed to bend the will of the captive, and without knowing if she would become his wife, or even if she would be able to find any traces of him." [1]

It was above all on landing on the coasts of Great Britain that the young fugitive must have fully realized to what dangers and difficulties she had voluntarily exposed herself. Of all the companions of her voyage, not one was going to London: one after the other they left her, taking different directions, each to his own home. And she found herself alone, without any guide or helper, in an unknown land, in the midst of a people of whose language she was quite ignorant. She knew but two words intelligible to Western ears: "London" and "Gilbert," the only

[1] *Vito et Passio S. Thomas Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martyris, auctore anonymo*, ap. Migne, *Patrologie latine*, tome cxc., col. 347 *et sq.* This volume reproduces the collection of the sources of the history of Thomas Becket, published at Oxford in 1845, by Doctor Giles. A new and more complete collection, and in some respects more exact, has been published since, the first volumes of which appeared in London in 1878, under the title of *Materials of the History of Thomas Becket.* We have consulted it, and have profited by it in our work; but in our notes we have thought it better to refer to the volume by Migne, which is more accessible and better known.

ones she could remember of her conversations with her father's young slave. Still she was not discouraged: by the aid of these two words which she repeated to every passer-by, sustained and inspired by the sentiment which filled her heart, and which was, so to speak, increased by all the sufferings of her long painful voyage, she at length reached the capital, and then succeeded in discovering the abode of him whom she had journeyed so far to seek.

One day, while in an inner room to which he had retired, Gilbert Becket heard a great clamour which seemed to come from the street. Moved by curiosity and perhaps also by a secret presentiment of what was about to happen he called Richard, the faithful servant who had shared his captivity in Palestine, and ordered him to hasten and to see what was the cause of the tumult. Richard obeyed; and in front of the house, he perceived the daughter of Amurath in the midst of an excited and noisy crowd, which her strange costume, her manners, and unusual speech had attracted. In great excitement, he returned to his master, who at first refused to believe his report, so utterly improbable did it appear. Still Gilbert was forced to yield to the evidence of his senses, and in spite of his astonishment and trouble he acted with much tact and wisdom. By his orders, Richard conducted the young girl to an excellent widow in the neighbourhood, well-known for her prudence and piety, who at Gilbert's request consented to receive the stranger and act a mother's part to her, while waiting till some definite decision should be taken concerning her.

Gilbert did not wish to take upon him the entire responsibility of this decision. He therefore went to the Bishop of London, who was at that moment conferring with six other prelates of the realm, on some very grave matters concerning the Church and State. Introduced into their midst, Gilbert related all the details of this strange adventure to which it was necessary to find some issue. When he had finished, the Bishop of Chichester spoke first, and in grave, almost prophetic tones, exclaimed: "It is the hand of God, and not that of man, which has brought this woman from so distant a country: she will bear a son whose labours and sanctity will turn to the profit of the Church and the glory of Our Lord." Welcoming this happy prediction, and adopting the same opinion, the Bishops unanimously decided that Gilbert should marry the young girl, provided she would consent to be baptized. The next day she was taken to St Paul's Church: "Will you receive baptism?" she was asked.—"It is for that," she answered, "and to marry Gilbert that I have come so far." As soon as she was considered sufficiently prepared, the rite of Baptism was solemnly administered in the presence of the Bishop of London and the six other Bishops who had pronounced in her favour. She received the name of Matilda, and some days later married Gilbert.

Before the birth of Thomas, Gilbert, who for some time past had been anxious and taciturn, yielding to his wife's entreaties, confided to her the cause of his changed demeanour. Shortly before their marriage, he had made a vow to re-

turn to the Holy Land as soon as possible, and he was now tormented by the fear of not keeping his promise to God, and on the other hand, of neglecting his duties as husband and father. Matilda, triumphing by her faith over the weakness of nature, told him not to consider her as an obstacle to the fulfilment of his vow; that during his absence, God would protect her and her unborn child; she only asked him to leave Richard with her, because, knowing her native tongue, he would be a great help to her in her solitude. Gilbert set forth, and his absence lasted three years and a half.

Thus the task of guiding the early education of Thomas devolved on Matilda, and on her alone. It has been said that he resembled his mother in many ways, and that one must recognize in the dominant traits of his ardent and impetuous character, and in the agitations that troubled so great a part of his life, the effects of that Eastern blood which ran in his veins. It is at least certain that he kept the impress of this maternal influence which was exercised, unchecked, at the time when a child's soul begins to open to external impressions, which penetrate it so easily and stamp themselves upon it as upon wax, often leaving indelible traces. Besides Matilda devoted herself with all the tenderness of a mother and the zeal of a fervent Christian to the training of this beloved son, for whom such a glorious destiny was reserved.

Did she even then foresee what he would one day become? One might suppose so, on reading certain contemporary legends. During her pregnancy,

she is said to have had a dream, in which it seemed as if she bore the Church of Canterbury in her bosom, and from this she afterwards believed that at the moment of her delivery[1] she heard the midwife exclaim (when receiving the child in her arms) "It is an Archbishop we are holding." Some time later, after the birth of Thomas, his mother had yet another dream. She thought she saw her child lying uncovered in his cradle, forsaken by his nurse. She went to find the latter, and reproached her for her negligence. "But, madam," said the nurse, "he has a beautiful large quilt over him."—"Bring it to me." The nurse brought her one; its soft and heavy folds were made of rich crimson-coloured texture. She laid it on her mistress's bed, and began unfolding it, that she might see it better. But the bed was too narrow for the covering, and it was decided to transport it first to the largest room in the house and afterwards to a vast court where they tried, but vainly, to spread it upon the ground. "Go out of the house, go to the public square, and there you will easily be able to unfold it." The nurse obeyed, but with no better success. As fast as the quilt was opened fold succeeded to fold, and they could see no end to it. One might have said that this wonderful stuff covered the whole of England, which in its turn, too narrow, could not contain it within its

[1] *Illa proegnans adhuc vidit per somnium quod archiepiscopalem Ecclesiam Cantuariensem totam in utero haberet.* Guillaume fils d'Etienne, *Vita Sti Thomae* ap. Migne, t. cxc., col. 111. *Cf.* Edouard Grim, *Sti Thomae Vita, ibid.*, col. 3 *et sq.* Roger de Pontigny, *Sti Thomae Vita, ibid.*, col. 57 *et sq.*

limits, and saw it spread over its borders and stretch far away beyond the seas. It was under this strange form, in which we may see the flights of Oriental imagination, that the daughter of Amurath loved to depict the future power and glory of her son. "If we relate these facts," said one of the Chroniclers who have preserved them for us, "it is not that we desire to build up the history of a great man on a woman's visions. But why keep silence about what every one knows and repeats and regards as certain? Besides, is it not in God's power to reveal to a mother her children's future by means of dreams, and do we not find more than the example of it in the Scriptures?"[1] We have only to compare these stories of the old Chroniclers with the Bishop of Chichester's prophecy, which we related above, and which events so well verified, and it will be difficult not to own that all through his early years, and even before the birth of Thomas à Becket, his parents and their friends prophesied great things for him.

Knowing then the value of the gift which heaven had bestowed on her, Matilda surrounded her child with the most tender and assiduous care. Very pious herself, she taught him as soon as she could his duties to God, gave him the taste for prayer, and inspired him with special devotion to the blessed Virgin, whom henceforth he used to invoke with filial confidence in all his necessities and troubles. Being also very charitable she instilled in him a love of the poor, and early taught

[1] Roger de Pontigny, *loc. cit.*

him the habit of alms-giving; besides which she found an ingenious and original means of associating him (even before he was conscious of his acts), and from his tenderest years, with the charitable works with which her life was filled. She very often had him weighed, and each time distributed clothes and provisions to the poor of a weight equal to that of her child.

But the latter was growing up, and the moment had come when he was to begin his studies. He was first of all confided to the Canons of Merton, celebrated for the excellent education which they gave to children of good birth, especially to those destined for the Church. According to his first biographers Thomas made rapid progress at Merton, thanks to his quick intelligence and his wonderful memory. At the same time, his good heart, gay humour, and happy disposition made him universally beloved; while his precocious maturity, his uncommon piety, and his angelic purity, inspired all, both masters and pupils, with an esteem bordering on veneration. Even his parents' affection was mingled with respect, for they always saw hovering over him, as it were, the memory of the revelations and presages which had accompanied his birth. The following fact affords us a striking testimony. One day his father went to see him at the convent. The child was brought to him, and directly he appeared Gilbert fell on his knees. "What are you doing?" exclaimed Prior Robert, who was present at the interview; "have you lost your senses? You prostrate yourself at your son's feet;

it is he who should take that attitude before you."— "My Lord," answered Gilbert, in a low voice, "I know what I am doing; this child will be great in the eyes of God." [1]

At Merton, Thomas could acquire only the rudiments of learning. For a liberal education to be complete it had then to be finished in those famous schools, where students from every country in Europe crowded round the chair of some celebrated doctor. By his father's desire, Thomas followed their example. Some historians [2] state that he went to Oxford. Even if he really studied there, his stay in this city would have been neither of great length nor of great profit for the culture of his mind. The school of Oxford whose origin, according to English Chroniclers, is obscured by the mist of ages, had lost very much of the brilliant renown which, they say, had surrounded it in former times. It was, it is true, on the eve of a revival under the impulse and conduct of Robert Pullus, a man of great learning and fame, who later on was to become a Cardinal and Chancellor of the Roman Church. But at the time when Thomas was pursuing his studies there, Robert had not yet returned to Great Britain, his native country, and was still teaching in Paris. In the twelfth century Paris was esteemed a second Athens, and for any one who aspired to be a savant, a sojourn in its schools was necessary, just as with

[1] *Domine, scio quid facio; erit iste puer magnus coram Domino.* Guillaume fils d'Etienne, *Vita et Passio Sti Thomae*, ap. Migne, t. cxc., col. 111.

[2] Fleury, *Histoire ecclesiastique*, liv. 70, No. 59. Lingard, *Histoire d'Angleterre*, ch. xii.

the Romans a voyage to Athens had formerly been considered the complement of a brilliant education. It was to Paris then that Thomas went to complete his studies; however, it seems that there, too, they were rather superficial. For in the midst of this immense scholastic world, so ardent in disputes of dialectic, so eager to be instructed in all the sciences then taught, we see him chiefly interested in perfecting himself in the knowledge of the French language, the only one used at Court and in the best society of London, and in getting rid of his English accent which was considered *mauvais ton* by the nobility and rich merchants of England. He was also careful, while in Paris, to form honourable friendships, which was all the easier on account of those qualities of mind and heart and of those amiable and solid virtues which time had only developed and strengthened in the former scholar of Merton. Indeed one may rightly believe that, forgetful of the path which heaven seemed to have traced for him at his birth and the signs of vocation which had marked his birth, Thomas à Becket in his youthful years dreamed less of becoming a learned scholar, than of playing a brilliant part in the world.

In fact, when he had re-crossed the Channel and returned to London, the positions which he occupied and the kind of life he adopted were not at all conducive to the ecclesiastical state. Through the influence of his father, who was highly considered by the rich citizens of London and even counted many powerful friends among the nobility, he was, in spite of his youth, attached to the municipal

administration of the Capital. He performed these duties successfully, and thus acquired a considerable and precocious knowledge of business, which decided many of Gilbert à Becket's rich friends to entrust his young son with the management of their fortunes. At the same time, fascinated by the charm of his manners, the gaiety and amiability of his disposition, they soon made him share their pleasures. Another event soon happened which seemed to bind him more firmly to a worldly life and its occupations. His father met with great reverses; repeated fires and other losses caused him, in a short time, to fall from an opulent situation into one of almost poverty. At his age, he could only count upon Thomas to retrieve the fortunes of his family by his zeal and talents.

But God had His own designs for this youth, whom He had so blessed on his entrance into life, and these designs were fulfilled. Two events happened at this time, each of which had a considerable though different effect upon Thomas's mind, and tended to change the course of his thoughts and plans for the future.

Among the worldly amusements to which his high-born protectors invited him, and which had the greatest attraction for him, hunting was certainly the first. One day he was accompanying Richard l'Aigle, who was hunting in the neighbourhood of London. They reached a wooden bridge, narrow and tottering, made solely for pedestrians, and which crossed a river just above a mill-dam. Richard spurred his horse over the bridge, and crossed it in

safety. Thomas wished to follow, but his horse made a false step and fell, with its rider, into the river. The latter was carried away, by the force of the current, under the mill-wheel, which was turning rapidly; he was about to be crushed, when suddenly the wheel stopped. On hearing the cries of those who witnessed the scene, the miller appeared upon the threshold of his dwelling, hastened to the assistance of the drowning man, and drew him out on the bank, unconscious, but still alive. On learning what had happened, his mother Matilda, who had never forgotten her former dreams, and still in her secret heart cherished hopes of seeing them realized, showed herself less moved by the peril which her son had incurred than by the divine protection of which, in this encounter, he had so manifestly been the object. She began to think that it was not in vain that he had been thus saved, as by miracle, from a death which seemed inevitable, but that Providence really had views concerning his future.[1]

It was shortly after this event that Matilda died. It was a severe blow to Thomas, who had cherished for his mother a tender veneration. For some time he appeared quite overwhelmed, but although he suffered cruelly from the desolation of his home, for Gilbert did not long survive his wife, he refused to seek for any outward distraction to his grief, as so many of his friends urged him to do. For three years he lived alone, entirely given up to his sorrow, indifferent to all worldly interests and pleasures; and when at length he emerged it was to take a step

[1] Roger de Pontigny, *op. cit.*, col. 50.

which should entirely change the whole future course of his life.

Theobald, the Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, had been intimately attached to Gilbert Becket, his compatriot, and according to some, his relative.[1] The prelate, transferring to the son the affection he had entertained for his father, offered to take Thomas into his palace and attach him to his person. After a long period of hesitation, caused, some of his biographers say, by his great timidity and excessive self-distrust, perhaps also, we believe, inspired by the thought that, in becoming Theobald's guest, he would be taking the first step towards an ecclesiastical career, he finished by consenting to accept the flattering offer made to him. Thus towards the year 1143, when about twenty-five years of age, Becket became a member of the household of the Primate of England.

[1] This is the opinion of M. Hippeau in his introduction to the *Life of St Thomas the Martyr*, by Garnier de Pont-Sainte Maxence, p. 24.

CHAPTER II

THOMAS À BECKET AT ARCHBISHOP THEOBALD'S—HE TAKES HOLY ORDERS AND BECOMES ARCHDEACON OF CANTERBURY

1143—1154

AT this epoch the Palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury presented the appearance both of a monastery and of a princely court.

The first Archbishop of this city was the monk Augustine, the apostle of England. For six centuries his successors, taken for the most part, like himself, from the ranks of the regular clergy, had shown themselves faithful to the monastic spirit and discipline inaugurated in this illustrious see by its saintly founder. This pious and ancient tradition had not been interrupted by the Norman Conquest, and was transmitted unchanged to Theobald by his immediate predecessors, especially by Lanfranc, a former *écolatre* or Doctor at Bec, the ancient Abbey of St Etienne de Caen, and by St Anselm whom it suffices to name in order to evoke the memory of one of the purest and greatest glories of the cloister, and one of the most perfect models of religious virtue. Like them, Theobald had studied; he had also taught in the monastery of Bec;

and like Anselm had ruled as an Abbot over that famous school of learning and sanctity. Even on the primatial throne of Canterbury, he kept the habit and led the life of a Benedictine monk.

But the Archbishop of Canterbury was not only the Head of the Church, he was also one of the chief personages of the State. His dignity, which placed him in the same rank as the foremost barons of the realm; the splendour of his household in accordance with the great revenues attached to his see; his influence which was considerable, especially when to the dignity of his title he joined the authority of superior talents, like Lanfranc, like Saint Anselm, like Theobald himself, who, in the absence of the king, several times held the reins of government; all this made his palace a veritable court, where a crowd of his officers and lay servants mingled with the clerks of his episcopal family, lords and officers with churchmen; the rich dress of Counts and Barons contrasting with the monastic robes of the monks of the Holy Trinity, who occupied the position and filled the office of Canons in the Cathedral of Canterbury.

In this austere yet brilliant setting Thomas à Becket appeared by no means out of place. His contemporary Chroniclers have pictured him at this epoch of his life as a young man of pleasing countenance, tall and elegantly formed, with distinguished manners, and easy and graceful speech. In all his relations he showed consummate tact, which made him a favourite with the greatest nobles, while his smiling amenity won the hearts of the poor and humble.

To his qualities as a man, he joined the virtues of a Christian. Even in those years, in which he seemed absorbed by the world and its amusements, his conduct had given no occasion for serious blame. His heart had remained pure, and he had a horror of the mere appearance of evil. Although he was of a gay humour when with his companions, yet none of them might indulge in too free speech in his presence, and that which equally repelled him was any semblance of prevarication. Of inflexible truth and loyalty, it was said of him, even when a child, that he would endure any punishment rather than tell a falsehood.

It is not astonishing that possessing such talents and virtues, Thomas made many friends while in the primatial household, besides gaining the affection and friendship of Theobald himself. But human weakness penetrates even the holiest of sanctuaries. The success and brilliant qualities of the new-comer could not but give umbrage to some of the older guests in the Archbishop's Palace. Among the number, one remarked Roger de Pont l'Evêque, a man of great intelligence and learning but of an ambitious and jealous character, whose talents were to lead him to the highest offices in the Church, but who, at this time, was not sufficiently advanced in the hierarchy to be above fearing a rival in this gifted young man, who excited so much interest in those around him. One day Archbishop Theobald happened to say in speaking of Thomas: "I have never found such devotion and fidelity in any of my servants." Roger at once conceived an

aversion for this new favourite by whom he saw himself in danger of being supplanted in his master's favour. He entertained for him a lasting hatred, of which he gave only too abundant proofs at the time of Thomas à Becket's conflict with Henry II. In the meantime he attacked him incessantly by epigrams or invectives, sometimes openly with almost brutal passion, at others using less violent but more perfidious methods. He would cast suspicion on Becket's intentions, ridiculing his speech, manners, and person, calling him derisively "Baillehache," from the name[1] of a Norman knight who accompanied him when he arrived at the Archbishop's Palace, believing that in giving him this nickname he would end by discrediting him in the eyes of his equals and superiors. "But, in this," says a contemporary Chronicler, "he was unwittingly a prophet, for the time was to come when Thomas should wield the axe or rather the sword of St Peter to separate this same Roger and his accomplices from the communion of the Faithful, and to take away from them, as they complained to the king, even the power of blessing the food on their table.[2]

Thomas suffered from this unjust persecution, but he endured it with calm and resignation; unfortunately it made a painful impression on the mind of Theobald, who twice felt himself obliged to part

[1] Or rather the surname of this knight, of whose name we are ignorant, and of whom we only know that he was Marshal of the Primatial court and a great friend of Gilbert Becket.

[2] Edward Grim, ap. Migne, t. cit., col. 6 and 7.

from one whom he had recognized as the best of his servants. In this twofold disgrace, Thomas found a faithful and powerful protector in the person of the Archbishop's own brother, Walter, then Archdeacon of Canterbury, and later on Bishop of Rochester, who on both occasions received him in his own house, and the second time enabled him to entirely regain the Primate's favour, to the sincere satisfaction of the latter, who had only reluctantly yielded to the obsessions of Roger and his party, and to the great joy of the numerous friends whom the victim of such unjustifiable proceedings counted among the inmates of the Palace.

The most affectionate and devoted of these friends was the celebrated John of Salisbury, one of the most brilliant and cultivated minds of his time, a philosopher, theologian, moralist, historian and poet, who has left a considerable number of works showing a vast and varied erudition, and written with a taste and elegance rare in the age in which he lived. He was besides a priest of great faith and piety, and of generous and disinterested nature. He was supposed to have been the Confessor of a Pope, and he was perhaps Thomas à Becket's; at least it is certain, that at the time of this contest with the king, he was one of his most ardent partisans, that he sacrificed himself at that time for Thomas à Becket, preceded him into exile, and remained to the end his cherished confidant, and his most trusted and intrepid defender. Long before, at the very beginning of Becket's stay in the Archbishop's Palace at Canterbury, John

had become intimately attached to him, and though he had preceded him and was already a priest surpassing Thomas in learning and talent, yet he accustomed himself to regard him henceforth as his superior, on account of the *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre* which he noticed in his new friend, which the latter had indeed acquired from his association with the great and in the exercise of the posts he had already filled.

But if Thomas had a knowledge of the world, and the practical experience, which was wanting to the ecclesiastics among whom he lived, as regards instruction, he was their inferior. We have already said his studies had been quite superficial; he resolved to repair what was incomplete in them, and set himself to work with such zeal and success that in a short time he was at least, so says one of his biographers, the most lettered of all the Archbishop's household.[1] That there might be some hyperbole in this complacent assertion was, it seems at least, the opinion of him who was its object. Indeed, not contented with what he had been able to learn through his own efforts, Thomas conceived the idea of again becoming a scholar and going to follow the lessons of the most renowned professors of the time. With Theobald's permission he went first to Bologna, where he was one of Gratien's most assiduous pupils, then on to Auxerre, which at that time possessed a famous school of Civil and Canon Law. On his return to England he had the re-

[1] *Post modum litteratissimus fuit.* Guillaume fils d'Etienne, ap. Migne, t. cit., col. 112.

putation, and justly so, of being a master of this double science, and henceforth he was reckoned among the first jurisconsults of his time which was an age of legists. Later on in his struggles with the royal power, may we not often recognize the inflexibility of the Canonist who will not sacrifice any legal principles [2] no less than the zeal and conscience of a Bishop who cannot give up any of the prerogatives and honours of the Church ?

With the knowledge which he had acquired at Bologna and Auxerre, Thomas was more than ever able to render signal services to his master, the Archbishop. The latter had already twice sent him on a mission to the Holy See, and the young negotiator had on both occasions shown singular acuteness and rare prudence. Now, that to these natural gifts he united the light and prestige of science, he became the chief counsellor of Theobald, on whom his influence was henceforth paramount. It first showed itself in the attitude which the Archbishop took about this time in the midst of the political dissensions which agitated England, and which in the highest degree interested the country.

The throne of England was then occupied by Stephen, son of the Count of Blois, and nephew, on his mother's side, to the late king, Henry Beauclerc. This prince died with the conviction that he left his throne to his daughter Matilda, widow of the Emperor Henry V., and now remarried to the Count of Anjou. He imagined that, if necessary, his nephew Stephen, whom he had always treated with a father's tenderness, would be his cousin's defender

and uphold her rights. But the news of Henry's death had no sooner spread to the Continent, than Stephen crossed the sea in haste and reached London, where he was proclaimed king. He succeeded with no great difficulty, thanks to the bad reputation of the previous reign and the absence of any formal law that definitely arranged the succession to the throne. But he soon lost the popularity with which he was at first surrounded; he began in fact to oppress the people, to molest the nobles and clergy, sowing everywhere disaffection, and alienating even his most loyal partisans. Matilda's courage revived; a powerful party was formed in her favour; she gained important advantages over her rival, and she would have seized upon the Government had not her haughty manner wounded many of the most faithful adherents to her cause, and compromised the latter by her thoughtlessness. On the other hand Stephen made one mistake after another. The two parties confronted each other without either of them gaining any decisive victory, and England was thus a prey to all the horrors of a Civil War.

Theobald had seemed undecided between the two opposite factions, until the day he took Thomas à Becket as his confidant and counsellor.

Thomas had always leaned to the side of Matilda. During the first of his recent journeys to Rome he had tried to detach Celestine, who had just assumed the tiara, from the cause of Stephen, whom his predecessor Innocent II. had always favoured, and he had so far succeeded that the new Pope had

written to the Archbishop of Canterbury that he must consider the English crown as a contested heritage, and that consequently until more ample information one could not legally decide in favour of either claimant. Thomas had no difficulty in persuading the aged Primate, who had not forgotten Celestine's injunctions, and had perfectly understood their meaning to adopt his views. Besides which, one could have said that Stephen set himself, by his abusive and ill-considered treatment of the English clergy, and especially of their head, to second the views and facilitate the efforts of Theobald's young adviser. In the early part of 1147 Pope Eugenius, owing to the intrigues of Arnold de Brescia, had fled from Rome and taken refuge in France, and at once convoked a Council at Rheims for the following year. Whether Stephen wished to revenge himself on the reigning Pope for Celestine's letter, whether he obeyed the pressure put upon him by his brother Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, recently deprived by the Holy See, at the Archbishop of Canterbury's request of his title of Legate, which he abused by troubling the Church in England; whether lastly, four centuries before Henry VIII., Stephen cherished the idea of separating his kingdom from the Roman communion; in any case he forbade all the English Bishops to answer the appeal of the Sovereign Pontiff.

[1] John of Salisbury, in one of his letters to Thomas à Becket, dated 1165, even seems to reproach him as if in this sense he had rather exaggerated (Joan. Saresb., *op. ed.*; Giles, t. 1, p. 195, Ep. 138).

In order to prevent any attempt at disobedience on the part of Theobald, whom above all others he wished to remove from the deliberations of the Council, the king, on the eve of the reunion of the august assembly, came to take up his abode in Canterbury, in order to keep the closest watch on the Archbishop. But the latter managed to defeat his plans, and gaining the sea-coast by night he reached a lonely little bay where a fisherman's bark was in waiting. He went on board with Thomas à Becket and other trusted members of his household. After a difficult crossing, owing to a stormy sea and contrary winds, the valiant passengers, whose lives had more than once been in peril, landed on the shores of France.

By the time Theobald could reach Rheims the Council was already sitting. His arrival was greeted by unanimous applause; the Pope highly praised his courage, and questioned him at length on the affairs of England. Stephen was judged to have deserved the penalty of excommunication. In the last meeting, the Sovereign Pontiff rose to fulminate the sentence, surrounded by the Doctors and Fathers of the Council holding lighted tapers, when Theobald interfered and begged the Pope to suspend rigorous measures. This movement of generosity was no doubt inspired by Thomas; in it one may easily recognize his character, in which firmness was always accompanied by charitable and prudent moderation. Yielding to Theobald's urgent entreaties, Eugenius consented, for the moment, to warn the king, and charged the Archbishop to

let him know, that if, within a delay of three months, he had not given satisfaction to the Holy See, and repaired his wrongs towards the English Church, the kingdom would be put under an interdict.

Consulting only his duty, no doubt also judging Stephen's heart by his own, and supposing that he would be grateful to him for having so generously prevented the sword of excommunication from falling, Theobald, when the Council was over, crossed the Straits, and appeared openly in Canterbury. The king demanded an explanation of his conduct. The Primate sent his answer by the royal messengers, stating simply the motives which had prompted him, and also making known the intentions and threats of the Sovereign Pontiff. At this news Stephen flew into a violent passion; he declared that all the possessions of the Primate were confiscated, and that he himself was banished from the kingdom: he also ordered him to quit England as soon as possible. Yielding to the storm, Theobald returned to France accompanied by Thomas à Becket, who thus had his first experience as an exile.

From St Omer, where he stayed in order to follow events more closely, the Primate awaited the expiration of the delay fixed by the Sovereign Pontiff. The term was approaching, and the monarch had shown no signs of yielding. In accordance with his advisers, Theobald left St Omer in September 5th, embarked at Gravelines for Great Britain, and landed on the estate of Hugo Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, who received him with

all honour, and conducted him to his castle of Framlingham. There the Prelate was in perfect security, and from thence, when the time came, in the latter days of this same month of September 1148, he proclaimed the Interdict throughout the whole of the kingdom of England.

Stephen himself might indeed affect to brave the Pontifical thunders; the English Episcopate, the greater part of it, devoted to the king either out of fear or interest, might feign to ignore the sentence of interdiction, and announce that it would take no notice of it; but the people could not reconcile themselves to the thought that all their religious life would be suspended, that the churches were to be closed, the bells condemned to silence, that there would no longer be any Mass nor Divine Office, and that the Sacraments would no more be administered to the dying. Rumours and protestations became so public and so violent, that the haughty prince was obliged to yield: he entered into negotiations with Theobald, who was allowed to return to his diocese, and there resume in peace the exercise of his ministry.

But if Stephen seemed thus to submit; if he sought, in appearance at least, to conclude an agreement with the Holy See and with the Archbishop of Canterbury, it was not merely from fear of a popular rising, it was also in the hope of securing the adhesion and concourse of the Church in the affair he had most at heart—in his struggle against Matilda and her party. In order to triumph more easily over his rival and frustrate beforehand any

hope she might found upon his death, which he himself could not help regarding as near, he formed the project of having his eldest son, Prince Eustace, crowned during his own lifetime. To this intent he ordered a meeting of the nobles and clergy to be convoked at London, and in the Primate's presence he demanded that Eustace should be anointed king without delay. But, as soon as he was able to foresee the king's designs, Thomas à Becket, with the consent of Theobald, had solicited and obtained from Pope Eugenius III. Apostolic letters confirming those which Celestine II. had formerly given to him at Rome. These absolutely forbade the Bishops of Great Britain to take part for or against either of the parties then at strife; the throne of this country was to be, until further orders, considered as a disputed inheritance. The Archbishop's conduct was thus made clear; to the king's desire, he had simply to oppose the prohibition of the Holy Father.

Stephen withdrew in rage; by his orders all the Bishops, Theobald among the first, were seized and thrown together into a house where they were kept prisoners, and bound to the most absolute secrecy. Conquered by these severe measures, or seduced by the king's promises, many of the Bishops abandoned the Archbishop, obtaining in exchange their liberty. As to Theobald, eluding the vigilance of his guardians, he succeeded in escaping and reaching Dover, where he again embarked for France; but this second exile was of short duration.

Whilst Stephen thus saw himself deprived of the

Church's aid which he had somewhat imprudently discounted, Matilda's party received a singular increase of strength and prestige by the appearance on the scene of her son, Henry Plantagenet. Having by his father's recent death become Count of Anjou, and being already Duke of Normandy through his mother, this young prince had just married Eleanor of Guienne, whom Louis VII. had repudiated on his return from the Second Crusade. As her dowry he received seven more French provinces: Poitou, Saintonge, Périgord, Limousin Auvergne, Angoumois and Guienne, and thus the domains of the vassal were, in France, much vaster than those of the king his suzerain. If to these immense possessions on the Continent, Henry could one day add the kingdom of England, he would become the richest and most powerful monarch in the West. This perspective was enough to inflame the courage and ambition of a youth of nineteen years. At the summons of several of the barons, partisans of Matilda, the prince hastened to England, ready, sword in hand, to defend the rights of his mother, which were also his own. It was precisely at the same moment that Eustace, still smarting from the humiliating defeat sustained by his father and himself at the Council of London, was preparing to seek revenge by a recourse to arms. The struggle between the two cousins at once began and threatened to be long and bloody, when Eustace died suddenly and mysteriously at the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. "Eustace, the son of Stephen," says John of Salisbury, "persecuted the Church of God. After devastating nearly all the

country by fire and sword, he saw the wealth of the Abbey of St Edmunds, and as owing to his foolish prodigality, he had nothing with which to pay his soldiers, he seized on the possessions of this church. But hardly had he partaken of the banquet which he had just made at the expense of this sacred spot, than the very same day, before he could even reach his palace, he was touched by the hand of the martyr, and struck down by a mortal malady, to which he succumbed in less than a week." [1]

Theobald then thought that he could now without danger reappear in England, that his presence and intervention might even aid in the pacification of the country. In fact Stephen was careful not to annoy him, and was only too glad, in the actual state of affairs, to accept him as an arbiter between himself and his cousin's party. The Primate undertook the task without delay, and after repeated efforts, he entered into negotiations with the principal nobles and bishops of the realm, and made them accept a convention which was agreed upon by Stephen and Matilda. It was therein stipulated that Stephen should remain in possession of his crown during his lifetime, but that at his death it should pass to Henry Plantagenet, whom he adopted as his son, and recognized as the legitimate heir to the throne. Three assemblies of the nobles and clergy were then convened successively at Winchester, London and Oxford, in which the barons and bishops of the different provinces of the kingdom came in turn to promise on oath to observe this

[1] Salisbury, *Policraticon*, ed. Giles, t. ii. p. 355.

treaty, which reconciled two enemies vowed, it had appeared, to an interminable war. Thus peace was rendered to England, worn out and almost exhausted by these fratricidal struggles which had already been the cause of so much bloodshed and ruin.

The popular voice did not hesitate to attribute this happy result to Thomas à Becket, and Theobald was among the first to do honour to his young counsellor, who had really inspired and directed all the negotiations, and had therein shown his superiority by the elevation and justice of his views, the pliancy and decision of his character, and by his prudence and zeal. The old Archbishop thought that this light should no longer remain hidden. Just at this juncture the Archdeaconry of Canterbury became vacant. Roger de Pont l'Evêque, who had succeeded Walter in this office, was himself promoted to the Episcopate. Theobald to replace him at once chose Thomas à Becket. But though it was some years since the latter had received the tonsure, he had not as yet taken Holy Orders. After causing him to pass rapidly through the minor degrees, the Primate conferred deacon's orders upon him, and on the same day appointed him Archdeacon of his Metropolitan See. This dignity, one of the highest in the English Church, gave to him who was invested with it, the title of Baron, the right to a seat immediately below that of bishops and mitred abbots, and in the assembly of the Lords, an authority which in the past had at times seriously held in check that of the Primate,[1] and lastly,

[1] "The Archdeacon often became troublesome to the Archbishop on account of his growing influence, and was gradually

considerable revenues. To these revenues, Thomas soon added those of numerous benefices which were conferred upon him either by Archbishop Theobald or by other bishops desirous of testifying their esteem and gratitude to the young Archdeacon, to whose advice and service they were glad to have recourse. Thus it was that Thomas soon found himself the incumbent of many rich prebends in the dioceses and churches of Oxford, Winchester, St Paul's, London, Lincoln, Beverley and Hastings. Such a plurality of offices was contrary to Canonical laws. In excuse the bishops, whose fault it was primarily, urged the merits of the subject, his zeal, and the great services he had already rendered to the Church, whose circle, owing to his more abundant resources, could be extended. But it was the use that he made of this accumulated wealth which in our eyes would rather serve to exonerate the authors of this infraction of the rules. Thomas had never forgotten his mother's teaching, and, since his infancy, had always given alms, according to his means. Henceforth he was to become a real providence to the poor, and contemporary witnesses are unanimous in exalting his profuse charity. Some years later, in the elegant and witty preface in verse to his *Policraticon* which he dedicated to Thomas à Becket, then Chancellor of England, John of Salisbury apostrophizing his book says: "My little book . . . choose for thy patron

replaced by a Vicar-General and an official; the title passed to the Dean of rural circuits" (*Church History* by Krauss, 6th period, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, 9th French Edition, t. II, p. 277).

one who is willing, and able to protect thee always and everywhere. Seek then for this luminary of the clergy, this glory of the English people, the right hand of the king, the model of virtues; seek for the Chancellor of England. . . . It is not difficult to find his dwelling; thou hast no need of a guide to conduct thee thither. The road to it is known by all except the wicked; it is open to rich and poor, to the unhappy as well as to the fortunate; every stranger rejoices to meet a father there." [1]

Scarcely a fortnight had passed since Thomas à Becket had been raised to the dignity of Archdeacon, when King Stephen died at Dover on the 25th of October. His adopted son succeeded him with the title of Henry II. He was crowned on the 20th of the following month, by Theobald, in the Abbey of Westminster. He did not forget all he owed to the old Archbishop, who in order to assure him the crown, had voluntarily exposed himself to banishment, to the confiscation of his goods, and to every kind of labour and disgrace. He therefore made him his chief adviser. But Theobald felt himself already enfeebled by age and infirmities. Only too justly alarmed by certain traits in the young prince's character, whose reform he felt himself too weak to undertake, he thought that he could not do better than by degrees to substitute near the person and in the confidence of Henry, some one who should exercise upon him a more efficacious influence, and should turn it to the profit of the Church and State. His choice could not be doubt-

[1] Joan. Saresb., *op.* t. i. pp. 1, 2.

ful, and naturally fell upon Thomas à Becket, and the Archbishop decided to ask the new king for one of the highest positions at Court for him. At the first overtures made to him on the subject, Henry responded with deference; then having seen the candidate in question, he was at once fascinated by his brilliant and solid qualities, and resolved to attach him to his person. Directly therefore after his accession, before the end of the year 1154, he appointed Becket Chancellor of England. Thomas was at this time scarcely thirty-six years of age.

CHAPTER III

THOMAS À BECKET CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND—HIS ADMINISTRATION—HIS CHARACTER AND MODE OF LIFE

1154—1162

SPEAKING of Thomas à Becket's nomination as Chancellor of England, Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, thus expresses himself: "It pertains to this office that he who is invested with it ranks as the second person in the kingdom and walks immediately after the king."[1] Guillaume remembered having seen Thomas at the height of his power and favour; but he wrongly attributes to his office that which the illustrious Chancellor owed to himself alone, to his superior talents and great services. By right, and according to the customs of the Court, the Chief Justiciary took precedence of the Chancellor, and the privileges of the latter were strictly enough limited. But from the moment Thomas appeared at the royal Council, he eclipsed every one else; his unrivalled capacity, the irresistible fascination of his person, had soon acquired for him the confidence and friendship of Henry, who, by degrees, gave him so great a share in all his affairs, and loaded him with so many honours, that he

[1] Ap. Migne, t. cxc. col. 113.

virtually made him the first among the ministers and dignitaries of his Court.

Scarcely was he installed as Chancellor than Thomas à Becket had an opportunity of at once displaying his powers. On the accession of Henry II., England was feeling the effects of the sixteen years of civil war through which she had just passed. Disorder and anarchy were almost universal. The rights of property existed, so to speak, no longer, violated, as they were in turn by the mercenary troops which Stephen had brought from over the sea, especially those from Flanders, who pillaged the country, and whose chiefs adjudged themselves lands and castles as the price of their services; and by a veritable army of robbers, which, favoured by the troublous times, was formed of all the most disreputable characters and infested the towns and villages, levying contributions on the inhabitants, or forcing them to flee and to seek shelter in the forests where at least their lives were safe; and lastly again by the nobles, who despoiled each other according to the chances of war, the conquerors seizing the goods of the vanquished, and even enriching themselves at the expense of the royal domain. The fields remained uncultivated; commerce and industry were paralyzed. These evils called for prompt and energetic measures. The new king, aided by his chancellor, went vigorously to work. In less than a year the aspect of the kingdom was changed. The foreign soldiers, abandoning their booty, had crossed the seas; the wealthy-domains had returned to their lawful possessors; the sovereign

regained his rights; the fortresses with which the country had bristled during the previous reign, and which were so many dens of sedition, were razed by hundreds; the citizens returned to their commerce, the labourers to their fields: "It was," cried Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, in an outburst of lyrism, in which one can see the vivid and sincere impression of the realities which he had under his eyes, "it was as the birth of a new spring in England. Holy Church was treated with honour and respect, the vacant abbeys and bishoprics were given without simony to irreproachable persons; the king, thanks to the protection of Him who is the King of Kings, succeeded in all his enterprises; the kingdom saw its riches daily increasing and abundance flowing on every side as if by enchantment; the hills were furrowed by the plough, corn covered the valleys, flocks filled the folds and pastures."[1] And both the people and nobles with one voice ascribed this sudden and beneficent change, which seemed almost miraculous, not only to the counsels but to the personal action of the Chancellor, whose hand was recognized in everything that was done to restore order and prosperity in all classes of society.

But Thomas à Becket also rendered other services which did not, in the same degree, affect the grandeur and prosperity of the State, yet were none the less of a nature to render him more and more acceptable to the sovereign. Henry II. loved luxury and fine buildings. But his palaces had, for the most part, fallen into ruin: one could hardly provide for their

[1] Ap. Migne, *loc. cit.* col. 114.

upkeep, while in the midst of these sanguinary convulsions, which had only just ceased, public finances were ruined, and the little remaining in the king's coffers had been absorbed by the cost of the war. In particular, the Tower of London, old and dilapidated, presented the most lamentable aspect. Thomas à Becket undertook to restore it; and the work was conducted with such celerity that, in the interval between Easter and Whitsuntide, if we may believe a witness,[1] all was finished. The number, too, of carpenters and other artisans was as great as was their activity, and the air around echoed to so deafening a noise that, however near one was, it was impossible to hear one's neighbour. It was the same case, or nearly so, with many other royal residences which one saw suddenly rise from their ruins and resume, as if by magic, their former splendour, to the great admiration of the neighbouring population, and above all to the lively satisfaction of a prince, young and fond of splendour and pleasure, and who felt his affection sensibly increase for a minister, who was so clever in flattering his most cherished tastes.

One event which happened in the second year of Henry's reign proves to what a degree of favour and authority Thomas à Becket had then risen. Desirous of assuring the succession of the crown to his children, and safeguarding them from any reverse of fortune, Henry II., knowing only too well the turbulence of the English nobles and the many defeats he had just inflicted on them, was only partly reassured

[1] Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, *loc. cit.*

as to their future dispositions. He therefore resolved to assemble the chief nobles and great barons of his domains in a solemn assembly in which they should recognize his two sons as his successors, and should take an oath, promising them fealty and homage in the future. A Parliament was therefore convened at the Castle of Wallingford for the Easter of the year 1150. But precisely at that epoch Henry was called to Normandy. He did not consider it advisable to adjourn the Parliament, and decided that it should be presided over by Thomas à Becket. In spite of this substitution, one did not remark any abstention or complaint among the members of this proud aristocracy. All were punctual at the meeting; all came and knelt docilely before the Chancellor, in the attitude of an inferior in the presence of his chief, as if they would thereby testify that they could not take the required oath between more worthy hands.

But if one may say that Thomas was then indeed the second person in the kingdom, if he seems to us to share in the power and in some sort in the majesty of the king, it is not simply because he presided over assembles and imposing ceremonies: we see him making treaties and even war in the name of and as a delegate of his master; he is indeed "*l'homme nécessaire*," [1] so absolutely necessary to Henry, that without his concourse it would almost seem as if the latter could no longer reign.

In 1158, Henry, from political motives, wished to be reconciled to the King of France, who, until

[1] Michelet, *Histoire de France*, liv. iv. ch. v.

then, had shown him a mistrust and partial hostility, which were indeed only too justified. Thomas à Becket suggested that the best means of effecting the desired reconciliation would be to arrange a family alliance between the two crowns. It was therefore resolved that the King of England should ask the hand of Marguerite, the daughter of Louis the Young, who was then scarcely two years old, for his eldest son and heir-presumptive, Prince Henry, then three years of age. He who had suggested this plan was charged with its execution. Henry II. could not have chosen an ambassador more capable of doing him honour by the distinction of his person and the magnificence of his household, or of serving him so well by the resources of his mind and the charm of his speech. The Chancellor went first of all to Rouen, from whence he sent to ask Louis at what date and in what place he would deign to give him an audience. The King of France answered that he would await him in Paris. Thomas set out, and in a well-known page often quoted by historians, *Guillaume, fils d'Etienne* has minutely described the brilliant and numerous suite of the ambassador. At the head of the procession marched a joyous squadron of two hundred and fifty young students, who on entering any towns and villages began to sing *sirventes* and national airs, and afterwards came the dogs in leash. They were followed by eight waggons, each one drawn by five horses, led by five drivers in their new attire. Each waggon was covered with skins and protected by two guards, and a large mastiff which was sometimes chained, sometimes free.

Two of these waggons were loaded with barrels of ale to distribute to the populace; another carried all the objects necessary for the Chancellor's chapel, another the furniture for his bedroom, a fifth that for his kitchen, a sixth his silver vessels and wardrobe: the other two were destined to the use of his followers. After them came twelve sumpter horses, on each of which was perched a monkey, with a valet riding behind; then appeared the squires, carrying their shields and leading the war-horses of their knights; then again other squires, sons of gentlemen, falconers, officers of the Ambassador's household, knights and ecclesiastics, riding two by two; and last of all came Thomas himself, conversing with some of his friends. As he passed, one heard the inhabitants of the country exclaim: "What manner of man must the King of England be, if his Chancellor travels in such lordly state!" [1]

But he not only dazzled the people by the somewhat strange display of his escort; he made himself partisans and friends by his truly royal liberality. From the chests which he had brought with him he drew out numberless rich vestments, valuable furs, silver and golden vases, adding to these rare birds, thoroughbred dogs and horses, and lavishing his presents with great profusion, he won over all hearts to his cause. And then when the pomp with which he surrounded himself from policy as well as by fitness and taste, when his gifts had produced

[1] Ap. Migne, t. cit., col. 119 *et sq.*—We have given almost literally Michelet's translation, *Hist. de France*, loc. cit.

their effect, and prepared the way, his eloquence and diplomacy did the rest.

Thus, Henry II. was soon able to go to Paris himself to be present at the betrothal of his son with the young princess royal of France, and to ratify what he had especially at heart, the marriage contract, so well drawn up under Thomas's inspiration. This stipulated that Marguerite should bring as a dowry to her future spouse, with other possessions, the Castles in Vexin, which the English monarch had long coveted because they had belonged to his father, and above all, because accordingly as they returned into the hands of the family or remained with that of a rival, they would be either a useful defence, or else a formidable menace to his possessions in Normandy.

One may well believe that Henry attached more importance to their solid advantages, than to the friendship of his royal neighbour, a friendship he was doubtless clear-sighted enough to esteem as very precarious. They were divided by too many interests. In fact a few months had hardly elapsed since the betrothal and fêtes at Paris, when a fresh quarrel arose between the two princes. Each believed himself to be the rightful possessor of the Duchy of Pontoise, and singularly enough each of them claimed it in his wife's name; Henry, because the ancestors of Eleanor had never ceased to urge their claims to this province, and Louis, because he had just taken as his second wife the sister of the reigning duke, Raymond V. of Saint Gilles. The King of England and his Chancellor were soon convinced

that this dispute could not be settled by diplomatic means, and that it must be referred to the chances of war.

An army was then recruited by the orders and under the surveillance of Becket, who himself took its command. He had already won a reputation as a clever jurist, as a first-rate administrator, and consummate diplomatist; he was now to show himself a skilful tactician and a valiant captain.

In the beginning of the summer of 1159, the new General again crossed the Channel and appeared on the Continent, but with a very different following from that which the previous year had caused so much surprise and admiration in the people of France. He had exchanged his rich attire for armour, and sword in hand advanced at the head of a great and warlike force. His march was rapid and marked by several successes, especially by the taking of Cahors. On the 24th of June he was already at the gates of Pontoise, where Henry soon joined him. Becket wished at once to attack the town which in its first surprise would have surrendered without resistance. But on the news of the arrival of the English, Louis le Jeune hastened to occupy the place, and sent orders to Henry not to attempt any violence against his suzerain. Whether out of sincere respect for the feudal claim, or whether, as some have said, from the fear of giving his own vassals an example which they might one day turn against himself, Henry hesitated, and thus left the Toulousains the time to recover themselves and receive reinforcements, and so lost the opportunity

of a certain and easy victory. At length he decided to raise the siege and to return to his Norman domains. Becket remained in the country to consolidate his recent conquests, to fortify some of the cities and castles, especially the town and citadel of Cahors, and to revenge himself for his disappointment by making skirmishes in which he frequently gained the advantage. It is related that in one of these encounters, while fighting a French knight hand to hand, he succeeded in unhorsing and disarming him, and kept his war-horse as a trophy of victory. The flatterers and courtiers of the Chancellor used to applaud these exploits, and boast of his courage and military genius. His true friends, agreeing on this point with his adversaries, thought that such deeds of prowess were unbecoming in a churchman. For such Becket was in fact, having received the tonsure, and also as Archdeacon of Canterbury. He had not ceased to be a churchman, nay, on receiving the Seals, he had even acquired a fresh title to be considered such, for at that time the office of Chancellor was always filled by an ecclesiastic, to whom was entrusted the care of the royal chapels, who collected for the profit of the Exchequer the revenues of bishoprics and vacant benefices; and lastly, who, if he were a priest, was by right the King's Confessor. Generally one only gave up this charge to be named bishop, and it was forbidden to sell or buy it, for such a transaction would have savoured of simony.

The customs of the times have sometimes been urged in excuse for Thomas à Becket, and illustrious

examples given such as that of Henry of Winchester, who in the reign of his brother Stephen so often appeared in mail at the head of an army, from which one concluded that what was permitted in a bishop might well be tolerated in a deacon. But it is none the less true that the rough and sanguinary profession of a soldier does not correspond with the sacred character of a minister of peace. It must also be added that the same might be said of the kind of life which Becket had adopted since his entry at Court, of the lavish expenditure of his household, the luxury which reigned in his palaces and on his table, his favourite amusements, and lastly of his rich dress.

One day at Rouen, when just recovering from an illness that had endangered his life, he was beguiling the tedium of convalescence by playing chess, attired in a cloak of the latest Court fashion, the sleeves of which were of exaggerated length. The Prior of Leicester appeared, and began to expostulate bluntly with him without any regard to etiquette: "But what are you thinking of, and how can you wear such a dress? It would be suitable for a falconer; but you are a clerk; you are so by Order and Jurisdiction, and moreover Archdeacon of Canterbury, Dean of Hastings, Provost of Beverley, Canon of several cathedrals, Administrator of the Archbishopric, and soon perhaps to be Archbishop."

Such a reproach Becket might more than once have brought upon himself while he was Chancellor of England. Nothing in his appearance at this time showed him to be a member of the clergy. And

indeed, judging from outward appearances, he would not have been recognized as such. One has just seen the entirely secular pomp by which he was surrounded on the occasion of his embassy to Louis le Jeune; he carried it into every detail of his daily life. Surpassing the greatest nobles of the land by his power and renown, he wished at least to equal them in his magnificence. The most costly furniture, the most artistically wrought works of art, the richest carpets, decorated his palace, in which there was a constant throng of servants, officers, gentlemen and pages. He kept open table, and that it might be abundantly furnished with the most delicate and dainty meats, his stewards had orders to regard no expense. The highest barons, and even princes, thought it an honour to be his guest. Such was their number that, with a heedfulness which gives us a strange insight into the manners of a time when the most refined luxury was mixed with a remnant of primitive simplicity, the pavement of the great hall was strewn with fresh straw or hay in winter, and with rushes in summer, so that the guests, who were unable to find room at the tables, large and numerous as they were, might not risk soiling their rich garments by sitting on the ground.

When in the midst of this splendour and profusion the master appeared one would have taken him for a courtier or warrior, but never for a churchman; above all, in those hours, when seeking repose from the cares and toils of government, he gave himself up to his favourite amusements. There were then interminable games of chess or dice; there were

continual hunting-parties for which he kept, at great expense, numerous packs of hounds of the best breeds, and an immense aviary full of falcons and gerfalcons, which were most carefully trained. Passionately fond of hunting in his youth, he gave it up later on, but in reality, never lost his taste for it. On this point those of his friends who found in their affection for him, the courage to see his faults and point them out, found ample matter for their zeal. John of Salisbury in his *Policraticon* does not fear to rebuke him publicly, and tells him: "Each condition has its duties and obligations. What have you and I in common with the profession of a hunter? . . . A prince should rule the people, a doctor teach them, a judge punish the guilty. Would you not be indignant if you saw a hunter aspiring to the throne or the Pontificate? Believe me I am indignant, and with greater cause, when I see you lower yourself from so high a rank to the despicable and murderous trade of a hunter." [1]

But such was not the sentiment and language of all those great lords so assiduous at the table and the feasts of the powerful and magnificent Chancellor. They coveted the favour of seeing their sons admitted into his household to form part of his court, and to be there instructed in all those arts, and trained in all those exercises, the knowledge and practice of which at that time made a perfect knight. For these nobles Thomas was a real master of elegance and distinction, and his palace was as a school through which one must have passed in order

[1] *Policraticon*, t. iv., ed. Giles, t. i. p. 29-30.

to be an accomplished gentleman. The king himself would have no other tutor for the heir to the crown. And this same Prince Henry, whose marriage, with Marguerite of France, had been so skilfully negotiated by Thomas, came to take his place in the latter's palace among these young nobles, that he might be brought up with them, share in their occupations and sports, and, like them, prepare himself to receive the order of knighthood.

Henry II. did not stop at this proof of confidence, certainly the greatest which he could show Becket; he lavished on him marks of affection and treated him less as a favourite than as a friend, one might almost say, an equal. He often invited himself to the Chancellor's table, and one sometimes saw him arrive unexpectedly in the middle of the repast, and without ceremony sit down beside the master of the house. Another time he would enter with his boar-spear in his hand, empty a goblet of wine at one draught, and at once retire after having greeted the Chancellor, who was presiding at the end of the vast hall, seated majestically under a canopy.

This voluntary negligence of all the laws of etiquette, this affectation of familiarity in his relations with his favourite, Henry did not fear at times to push still farther. Witness this burlesque scene which was long the subject of conversation and jest at the court, but which only proved what a special place the fortunate Chancellor occupied in the affections and intimacy of his sovereign. Both of them were one day riding through the streets of

London, conversing gaily, and at some distance from the royal escort which was following in respectful silence. It was mid-winter, and the cold was piercing. Coming towards them appeared a beggar, bent with age, and scarcely covered by his miserable rags. "Do you see that old man?" said the king.—"Yes," replied the Chancellor. "How poor and weak, and how badly clothed he is! Would it not be real charity to give him a good warm cloak?"—"Indeed, my lord, it would be a very suitable alms, and you as a king ought to make it." The beggar approached and was passing the two cavaliers, whom he did not know. "Friend," said the king, "wouldst thou not be glad to have a good pelisse?" The old man, thinking it a jest, was continuing his way, when the king, who, for some moments had been looking with a meaning glance at the scarlet cloak, lined with ermine, which the Chancellor was wearing, said to him: "By my faith! as it is such a good deed, you shall have the merit of it"; and seizing the mantle by the hood he pulled at it with all his might, trying to take it away. Thomas resisted. They came to blows, and both were on the point of falling from their horses. At this strange spectacle, the knights belonging to their suite rushed forward, demanding the cause of such a dispute. Thomas was far too politic not to confess him vanquished. Henry took the cloak and gave it to the beggar, who disappeared, thanking his unknown benefactor profusely, and blessing God for having sent him such an opportune and unexpected alms.

"Never," adds the Chronicler who relates this incident as well as the preceding ones,[1] "had two men been so closely united since Jesus Christ came upon earth to teach us the grand law of fraternity." But this favour, almost unexampled, which at least he shared with none other, Thomas à Becket, let us hasten to say, owed to no forgetfulness of his duties, to no complaisance which could violate his conscience and diminish him in our eyes. It would be a great error to believe, as some have wished, that when Chancellor of England, he had, as regards the reciprocal rights of Church and State, a manner of thinking and acting, which he was obliged to disavow later on, when he was enthroned in the Primatial See of Canterbury. The insinuations of which he has been, in this respect, the object, rest simply upon calumnious reports or erroneous inductions, upon texts falsified by the bad faith of his enemies, or badly interpreted by the historians who made use of them.[2] If it happened that during his office the Church suffered in her privileges, the fault was due to the king and not to his minister. The latter deplored the attacks directed against the rights which he recognized and respected, but which he could not always cause to triumph over the sovereign's claims. It would have been most imprudent, especially then, when one might

[1] Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, Ap. Nigue, *loc. cit.*

[2] See on this subject in *Saint Thomas de Cantorbery*, by the R. P. Dom l'Huiller, t. i. ch. ix. p. 141 *et sq.*, a minute and conclusive discussion of texts, which, as one will understand, it is impossible for us to enter into here.

still hope to bring him by degrees back into the right path, to oppose a prince so arrogant and irascible, one so jealous of his power and inclined to overstep its limits. Becket was both skilful and diplomatic, but he was not always so successful as at the time of the disputes which arose in Europe, and especially in England, concerning the Schism of Octavian.

Adrian IV., the only Englishman who has ever occupied the throne of St Peter, had just died. The Conclave had met, and Roland, Chancellor of the Roman Church, was elected by twenty-three voices out of twenty-six, and took the name of Alexander III. Two of the dissident Cardinals had voted for the third one, Octavian, Cardinal-priest of St Cecilia's. Upheld by Frederick Barbarossa, whose creature he was, Octavian contested the validity of Roland's election, and claimed to reign under the name of Victor IV. All Christendom was divided between the two competitors. The Emperor endeavoured by his letters and ambassadors to influence the choice of the kings of France and England, and to attract them to Octavian's party. Henry hesitated, and would not allow his decision to be forestalled, nor that without waiting for it any bishop in his domains should give his opinion one way or the other. He was with his Court at Neuf-Marché near Rouen, where the prelates and barons of Normandy were about to assemble in Parliament to examine the title of the two claimants, when he learnt that the Archbishop of Rouen had openly declared himself in favour of Alexander, and that he had sent his

nephew, the Archidiacre Gilon, to all his suffragans to induce them to follow his example and recognize the lawful Pope. Furious, but not daring to directly attack the Archbishop, who was venerated as a saint throughout the province, he vented his anger on Gilon, and ordered his house to be destroyed. "That," said Thomas tranquilly, "will put me to great inconvenience."—"And why?" asked the king.—"Because," replied the Chancellor, "it is in Gilon's house that I always stay when I go to Rouen." Henry smiled, and said no more about it.

But the following day it was announced that Guillaume de Passavant had imitated the Archbishop, that he had even gone to the Cardinal Legates of Alexander, and had taken an oath of submission and obedience to the Pope they represented. Henry at once dictated an order that the episcopal palace of Le Mans should be immediately razed to the ground; this he signed, and waving the parchment before those who were the witnesses of this scene, "The people of Maine," he exclaimed, "will soon hear of their bishop." Entrusted with the sentence Thomas carefully chose the messengers who were to deliver it to the governor of Le Mans, and ordered them to take four days to make a journey which usually required scarcely two. The next day, at the Chancellor's request, some of the Bishops went to implore the clemency of the king on behalf of their colleague, but he was inexorable. The day after, other prelates made a similar request, but were again met with a refusal. Some hours later Thomas himself went to the king, but, like the others, was unsuccessful. He then let

the night pass, and the next morning presented himself once more before the monarch, and renewed his entreaties. Henry, convinced that the courtiers had arrived at Le Mans and that his orders were at least partly executed, pretended to be touched, and to let himself yield, and answered, that he would consent to send off a counter order immediately. The Chancellor at once chose a trustworthy man, and told him to go as far as Le Mans, doubling the stages, and riding night and day. Becket was punctually obeyed, and his courier arrived at Le Mans when the other messengers had only just made their entrance into the town. On this occasion Thomas proved that he was a worthy descendant of his Norman ancestors, and capable of measuring himself with the great grandson of William the Conqueror. The latter was still laughing over the trick he thought he had played on his Chancellor, when he learned what had passed. This time it was Henry who showed himself diplomatic, and taking his deception in good part, he declared with as much wit as generosity, that it was a pleasure to have to do with such an adversary.

It was only a few months after this incident that Henry II. met Louis le Jeune at Toulouse, where a solemn council reunited the two monarchs and all the clergy of their realms in one common obedience to Pope Alexander. Doubtless political motives had influenced the King of England's decision, just as reasons of this order had formerly been the cause of his long hesitation. At the same time it is easy to believe that Henry yielded perhaps unknowingly to

the influence of his prudent and clever Chancellor, an influence which was all the more efficacious that it was exercised with so much discretion. From the two anecdotes above mentioned one may easily understand the rôle of Becket in religious questions, when he had to intervene as Chancellor of the kingdom. He was not yet the heroic and intrepid champion of the cause for which he was one day to die; but he was its advocate, insinuating, clever, full of tact and resource, and was more than once able to make it triumph, or at least to lessen the blows aimed at it; in any case he was always faithful to and never betrayed it. In this respect the Chancellor had no need to change when he became Archbishop.

The same must be said on the subject of his morals. They were always pure and irreproachable. On this point witnesses are unanimous, and the affirmations of his biographers are singularly strengthened by the silence of his enemies. Snares were often laid for him, either to cause him to fall, or at least to find him in error. The king himself spread more than one ambush for him. Thomas had one day gone with the Court to Stafford, where he was hospitably entertained in the house of a clerk named Vivien. There was in this town a certain Damoiselle Avice, a young woman of dazzling beauty but doubtful virtue, whose liaison with Henry II. was notoriously public. Avice—and we can scarcely believe that Henry had not something to do with the plot — had no sooner heard of Thomas's arrival, than she began to send message after message in the sight and hearing

of Vivien's neighbours and servants. The latter, alarmed at the results of such an adventure, should the rumour spread that he sheltered under his roof a rival of the King, resolved to assure himself of the truth. One night he stealthily entered Thomas's chamber, a horn lantern in his hand. His glance fell first of all on the bed: it was empty, and the coverings had not been displaced. His suspicions were about to be confirmed when he decided to open his lantern. By the bright light which it threw over the room, he perceived the Chancellor crouched at the foot of the bed, in the attitude of a man who while kneeling in prayer had been overcome by sleep. Vivien at once retired with even greater precaution than he entered, glad that the Chancellor had not awakened, and still more glad to be freed from all doubts as to his guest's virtue.

If Becket thus remained unspotted amidst all the dangers of the Court as well as in the most passionate time of his youth, it was because he knew how to use the weapons of spiritual warfare. Under his worldly exterior was hidden a mortified and devout soul, and this brilliant courtier was given to prayer, and his mortifications, both in degree and kind, recall the most austere usages of the cloister. One of his relations who had never seen him came to London to consult him about some important affair. He was to be received early, before the Chancellor was invaded by the usual crowd of visitors and the multiplicity of business, and the sun had not risen when he set out. On approaching a church he perceived before the still

closed doors, a man who tried to conceal himself in the folds of his long cloak, and who, prostrated on the threshold, appeared absorbed in prayer. At the sound of the new-comer's footsteps the devout personage stirred, rose abruptly, and disappeared into the shadows of the night. Some moments later the client knocked at the Chancellor's gate; he was at once ushered into the presence of his illustrious relation, and what was his surprise to recognize from his bearing and gait and even the cloak which he was removing, the nocturnal pilgrim he had just met. To prayer Thomas joined penance. Seated daily at a table loaded with the choicest dishes and most delicious wines, he was extremely sober, and drank nothing but water mixed with a little fennel or spice. He did not stop there, but frequently took the discipline, receiving it when at Canterbury, from the hands of the priest of St Martin's Chapel, or from those of the Prior of Holy Trinity when he was in or near London.

In spite of his frivolity and love of pleasure, Henry II. must have congratulated himself on having such a virtuous minister. At that time he cherished a project, which it seemed would in itself excite too much opposition on the part of the nobles and bishops of the realm, and which would have been still more difficult to realize if the private life of the Chancellor had laid him open to criticism. The aged Archbishop of Canterbury was fast declining. His succession would soon be open, and no one in the king's opinion was better fit to hold it than Becket. It cannot be doubted that Henry had

decided even at that time, at least in outline, on the plan of his religious policy, which he was soon to make known, and for the execution of which he felt he should need the complacent co-operation or the resigned submission of the future Primate. And he flattered himself that he would find these dispositions in his Chancellor. It was on the 18th of April 1161 that Theobald died. Thirteen months elapsed before he was replaced. Henry had no scruple, in spite of his Chancellor's frequent remonstrances, in keeping the Church's benefices vacant, so that their revenues might be of greater profit to the royal exchequer. But historians are all agreed in saying that this time he did not act from such a motive. Did he hesitate to decide for fear of being deceived in his previsions, or did he wonder, with some uneasiness, if once at the head of the English Clergy Becket would change his character and conduct, and if the Archbishop would always show himself as docile and conciliating as the Minister? It is difficult to believe that the king entertained these doubts if one only thinks of the imperturbable security he showed when at the last moment the enemies of Becket and Becket himself tried to inspire him with distrust. It is more probable that Henry wished to weary the patience of Becket's enemies, a powerful party both at the Court and among the higher clergy, and that he hoped by these delays and adjournments to induce them, when tired of the struggle, to give up all desire of resistance.

In the spring of the year 1162 Henry at length

decided to declare his wishes, and at the same time to make it understood that he intended to be obeyed. He thought he was acting as a skilful politician, and making a decision favourable to his own interests and tranquillity. No doubt, too, prompted by a sentiment of sincere affection he wished to reward his faithful minister and the amiable companion of his pleasures. He little thought he was preparing for himself a long series of anxieties and disappointments, which were to end in a violent struggle, in which he would seldom have the advantage, and never the nobler part, while this summit of honour to which his favourite was raised was but the first stage on the latter's road to martyrdom.

CHAPTER IV

THOMAS À BECKET ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY—HIS ORDINATION—REFORM OF HIS LIFE—FIRST ACTS OF HIS EPISCOPATE—COMMENCEMENT OF THE CONFLICT WITH THE KING

1162—1163

HENRY II. was in Normandy when, in the month of May 1162, he resolved to put Thomas à Becket in the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury. He ordered him to come to the Castle of Falaise, and when there told him first of all that he desired to send him to England on an important message: he afterwards enumerated some matters which he was anxious to arrange, but all this in the tone of a man who is still keeping something back; and, while speaking, he kept watching him with an expressive smile as if to see if he had any idea of the truth. Becket was not ignorant of the king's designs, which, for some time already, had been rumoured at Court; but he pretended to know nothing. Suddenly losing patience Henry exclaimed: "Do you not guess then what it is about, and that my wish is that you should be Archbishop." At these words Thomas began to smile in his turn, and glancing at the rich garment he was then wearing that was certainly anything but

ecclesiastical: "Only see," said he, "what a saintly and edifying person you wish to charge with such a sacred office." Then leaving his jesting tone, he added seriously that, if he eonsented to be Archbishop, he should fear to lose the favour of the king, whose views on matters of religious politics he could neither adopt nor further. And he ended by these prophetic words: "You will ask concessions from me which it will be my duty to refuse; your enemies and my detracters will profit by this to excite you against me; you will withdraw your friendship, and, in its place, will entertain for me a mortal hatred."

For all response, the king turned towards the Chief Justiciary of England, Richard de Luci, who with some other nobles was present at this conversation, and said to him in a loud voice: "Richard, if you saw me in my coffin, would you not do all you could to assure the crown to my son?"—"Sire, I would use my best efforts."—"Well then, I wish you to do as much, in order that the Lord Chancellor may become Archbishop of Canterbury."

Judging from the king's attitude, Becket thought all resistance useless. Moreover, he had not waited for the order just now intimated to him to ask how he should act. As soon as he was able, thanks to public opinion, to suspect Henry's intentions concerning him, he had consulted his best friends, John of Salisbury no doubt first of all; he had also taken the advice of a Legate of the Holy See, Cardinal Henry of Pisa, then in Normandy. All agreed in recommending him to submit; the Cardinal, in

the name of the grave interests of the Church, had even made it a matter of conscience. Thomas à Becket then set out for England, ready to accept a dignity which he could only consider a heavy burden.

Richard de Luci crossed the sea almost at the same time, accompanied by the Bishops of Exeter and Chichester. They all three went to the Monks of Canterbury, to enjoin them in the king's name to proceed as soon as possible to the election of a new Archbishop, and letting them know the name of Henry's candidate. The three ambassadors acquitted themselves of their mission with great tact and success. They had scarcely arrived at Canterbury when they convoked the Monks, who had the privilege of sharing in the election, and, when these were assembled in the Chapter House, the Chief Justiciary made a speech something to this effect: "King Henry, our Lord and Master, considering that for some time your church has been without a pastor, desires that this state of things should end. His wish then is that you should choose a man who may become your Father and Head and do honour to the See. You have the right of election, of which the king does not think of depriving you. Know then how to use it in such a manner that you may have nothing to repent of, either before God or man. You are not ignorant of the good which will result to the Church from a happy choice, thanks to which harmony will reign between the king and the future Archbishop. If on the contrary, which God forbid, there were

antagonism and conflict between them, is it necessary to tell you what misfortunes would inevitably follow ? "

After this speech, which the two Bishops warmly seconded, Henry's three delegates retired, leaving the Prior and Monks alone to deliberate in Chapter. Richard de Luci, like a true diplomatist, had been careful not to pronouce any name, and this reticence was doubly adroit; for besides its preventing in the future any suspicion of undue pressure exercised on the electoral body, it could not fail to incline the latter to the desired choice, and all the more readily that one had so little thought to impose it on them by authority. Thus the electors had scarcely been a few minutes alone when they expressed the opinion that before voting, they could not refrain from consulting the king's representatives, who alone were able to make his preference known to them. The Chief Justiciary and the two Bishops were then summoned and returned to the hall. At the name of Thomas à Becket some objections were raised by the elder monks, who were very attached to the traditions, and observed that since the time of St Augustine, the See of Canterbury had always been occupied by the sons of St Benedict, except in two cases which had not been conducive to the welfare of the diocese not to the honour of the Church. But the royal ambassadors knew so well how to insist upon the guarantees of peace and prosperity, which the choice they advised offered both to the State and the Church; and how to put into relief the integrity, dignity and

piety of the life of the proposed candidate, that all voices pronounced in his favour, and he was unanimously elected.

The election had to be ratified and solemnly promulgated in a plenary Council of the nobles and clergy. This assembly was held at Westminster on the Wednesday before Whitsuntide. It was presided over by the heir-presumptive to the throne, the pupil of Thomas à Becket, and the betrothed of Marguerite of France. The young prince, though only seven years of age, already bore the title of king, which he had received on the day when the great feudal lords of the crown had taken the oath of allegiance to him. At the opening of the session, the Prior of Canterbury, surrounded by his monks, first of all declared that Thomas à Becket had been elected by them, according to canonical rules and by unanimous vote, Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England. Only one dissentient voice was heard, that of Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of Hereford, a prelate renowned for his learning and for the austerity of his life, but spoilt by ambition. This was but the prelude of the long and disloyal opposition which he never ceased to offer Becket, and which only too plainly showed his disappointment at seeing another preferred to an office which he thought his own merit and services deserved. The murmurs which greeted it caused him to feel how inopportune was his intervention; and he dared not refuse to join his voice to those of all the members of that noble assembly, which, without exception, ratified the vote of the Primatial Chapter.

There was still another sanction to be obtained, that of the young prince, who, in this solemn circumstance, represented the king, his father. This duty devolved on one of the most illustrious and oldest members of the English Episcopate, Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, brother of the late King Stephen. His rôle throughout the affair does him great honour. He might have cherished some resentment at the use which Becket had formerly made of his ascendency over the mind of the aged Archbishop Theobald, whom he had detached from Stephen's party, and whom he had also induced to despoil this same Henry of Winchester of the title of Legate to the Holy See. But Henry had just spent many years in retreat and prayer at the abbey of Cluny, where he had enjoyed the conversations and profited by the counsels of the Venerable Peter. From his contact with him, one of the noblest and most evangelical souls of that age, Henry had gradually renounced what had been too secular and worldly in his sentiments and manner of life, and only judging of things below by the light of faith he had no other wish than to procure the welfare of religion and the glory of God. It was he who went to fetch the Archbishop elect and conducted him to the feet of the young king. Then addressing himself to the latter, he asked him to confirm all that had just been done. In his childlike voice the Prince answered that he entirely confirmed it in virtue of the full power he held from the king, his father.

But the Bishop of Winchester was not yet satis-

fied. As if he had been suddenly favoured by the gift of divination and foresaw the fearful tempest which would shake the English Church and threaten to dishonour her chief: "Sirs," he added, "one word more. Our chosen candidate has long had the finances of the kingdom in his hands; he has taken part in the Privy Council of the king; the Church asks you to-day to give him a receipt in full, for all accounts of any kind, so that henceforth he may be sheltered from all claims and pursuits." Henry Curtmantle, by the advice of the nobles and great officers of the crown, at once gave the receipt asked, which one day Thomas à Becket will have need to recall when trying to prevail against the violence of the king's anger.

The assembly could now separate: it did not do so, however, before deciding on what day the consecration of the new Archbishop should take place; the ceremony was fixed for the Sunday after Whitsuntide in the octave of the Feast. The reason for such haste was because a rescript from the king had just arrived from Normandy, which ordered the election to be suspended. So sudden and so unexpected a change in Henry's intentions was generally attributed, not without cause, to the influence of the Queen-Mother, Matilda. Whilst Henry of Winchester was showing himself so generously oblivious of his former grievances, Matilda seemed to have entirely forgotten the signal services which, under the preceding reign, Becket had rendered her and her son, who, without the able and devoted co-operation of Archbishop Theobald's young counsellor,

would certainly not have so easily succeeded to Stephen's inheritance. Was she jealous of the Chancellor's ascendency over the king, her son, or was it that her maternal tenderness, making her clear-sighted as to the future, was alarmed beforehand at the conflicts which could not help arising between a prince, who was at heart ill-disposed towards the Church, and a prelate incapable of sacrificing his duties as a bishop to his interests or attachment as a courtier? In any case, directly she knew what successor Henry wished to give to Theobald, she strongly disapproved of his choice, and did all in her power to oppose it. But matters were too far advanced for it to be possible to withdraw with honour. It was decided then that the royal rescript should be kept secret, that above all Becket should not be told of it, and that no time should be lost, in order that the deed once accomplished should soon cut short all attempts at resistance or opposition, either on the part of the king or of the newly elected Archbishop.

Thomas à Becket was as yet only a deacon. On Saturday, the 2nd of June, the eve of his consecration, he received the priesthood at the hands of the Bishop of Rochester. The honour of consecrating him was solicited by several prelates, among others by Roger de Pont l'Evêque, Becket's old enemy, whose jealous hostility was in nowise disarmed. He demanded to exercise what he esteemed a privilege of his episcopal see, with the design of finding therein an argument for claiming, as he had already begun to do, the pretended pre-eminence of his See of York over that of

Canterbury. But his intentions were unmasked, and it would have been considered an insult to the Bishop-Elect to defer to Roger's wishes, besides the latter was still in his diocese, and had not time to arrive at Canterbury by the day fixed; this impossibility appeared sufficient to colour a refusal, which in reality was inspired by quite other motives. It was the Bishop of Winchester who was asked to consecrate the new Primate.

Never before had a ceremony of this kind taken place in the midst of greater pomp nor of a larger or more imposing assembly as regards both numbers and rank. At its head was the young king, surrounded by a multitude of laymen and nobles, by more than fifteen bishops, and by several abbots and ecclesiastical dignitaries of every rank. Then, an innumerable crowd of people filled the vast Cathedral, and overflowed into the square in front. All along the route from London to Canterbury the riverside population hastened at the approach of the Archbishop's procession, and as they perceived it in the distance, broke forth into enthusiastic applause. He, however, advanced humble, and collected, in the attitude of a man who is bent under the burden which is imposed on him. At one moment, taking Herbert de Bosham apart, he said to him: "If ever you notice anything reprehensible in me, if you hear me blamed for any cause whatever, do not fail to warn me without any hesitation or evasion: two pairs of eyes often see better than one."

The ceremony itself was marked by an incident worthy of mention. At the examination, with which

the majestic function of the Consecration of Bishops opens, and which is indeed one of its most touching rites, Henry of Winchester thought he might take upon himself to add a question to those inspired by the circumstances, one however which was not provided for in any Pontifical recognized by the Church: "Dear brother," said he, turning towards the Archbishop Elect, "it remains for me to ask you to decide between two things which seem almost incompatible, and to declare which you prefer, the favour of this earthly king or that of the King of Heaven?"—"With God's help," answered Becket, "my choice is already made: never for the love of any earthly monarch, and to keep his favour, shall I renounce the grace of my Heavenly King." Those who, in this immense assembly, remarked and understood this departure from Liturgical Uses must have seen in it a prophecy of that future, as sorrowful as it was glorious, which awaited the new Primate of England.

Thomas à Becket had in his consecration received with the pontifical unction the plenitude of sacerdotal power. But he did not consider he had a right to any act of jurisdiction as Bishop, still less as Metropolitan, before he had obtained the pallium from the Pope, that emblem of the power and dignity of the Archbishops as well as of their subordination to the chair of St Peter. It was a tradition in the Church of Canterbury, that the new Primates should wait for this precious insignia before being enthroned. Most of the predecessors of Thomas had observed this custom, and he did not think of omitting it. He had indeed perceived that

at the bottom of the attempts of Henry II. against the immunities and rights of the clergy, there had been a scarcely dissimulated spirit of independence with regard to the Holy See, and a secret tendency to separate, at least in practice, the English Church from the authority of the Church of Rome. And he felt that there was no better way of taking up his position in the struggle which was preparing than by showing himself closely and firmly attached to the centre of unity. Thus, after his consecration, one of his first cares was to send to Montpellier, where Pope Alexander then was, a deputation of five ecclesiastics of proved constancy, among whom one remarked the faithful John of Salisbury, who was, we might say, as a contemporary soon did,[1] "the right eye and arm of the new Archbishop." The mission of these ambassadors of Thomas à Becket was to request for him the pallium, and to bring it back to Canterbury.

But Becket did not wait for their return to think of reforming his life. Never, one may say, was there so sudden and so complete a metamorphosis as that which was then seen in the person and manners of this man, who, even on the eve of it, eclipsed all the courtiers by his display and love of worldly pleasures. The change was visible to every one who passed the threshold of the episcopal palace. Certainly they could see it belonged to a prince of the church, for at all times the English, more than any other nation, have considered that the dignity of a person ought to be reflected in

[1] Pierre de Blois.

the outward circumstances of his life, and too great a simplicity would not have failed to deal a blow at their self-respect. Still we do not fear to appropriate the word of one of the most eloquent of Becket's biographers, and say that "in his new dwelling were to be found no other splendours than those of alms-giving and hospitality." [1]

For some time the Archbishops of Canterbury had been renowned for their many charities. Theobald had doubled those of his predecessors. Since his accession Thomas wished that his own alms should redouble those of Theobald. It is said that they represented the tenth of his revenues from all sources, either in money or in kind. But it is impossible to estimate the secret alms, perhaps the most numerous of all, which he caused to be distributed, with as much munificence as discretion, to needy families, especially at the beginning of winter. Those which we know of from historians belong, so to speak, to the ostensible and daily practices of charity which he had established in his palace. Every day before dawn he went, after Matins, into a room apart where he found thirteen poor men who were waiting for him, and whose feet he washed, kissing them afterwards with pious humility. Before sending these unfortunates away, he gave each one provisions for the day and four pieces of money. Every day too a banquet was served by his orders to more than a hundred poor people.

But at the Archbishop's table other guests were still found as numerous and of as high station as those

[1] Ozanam, *Deux chanceliers d'Angleterre*, p. 132.

which were seen in the Chancellor's house. Only, if they were laymen, they were served in a separate room, where one might hear the noise of animated conversation, and, according to the custom of the times, the joyous outbursts of an orchestra of skilful musicians. As to Becket himself, it was in the refectory of the monastery of Holy Trinity and in the company of the monks, of his clerks and chaplains, and of ecclesiastical guests, that he took his own repasts, during which the reading of his cross-bearer was only interrupted by the remarks which he exchanged from time to time with his neighbours on some point of doctrine or history touched upon by the author of the book. For the rest the two tables at the palace, that of the Archbishop and the monks as well as that of the lay nobles, were always served with princely abundance and refinement; but having made this concession to the distinction of his guests and his elevated rank, Becket confined himself within the limits of the strictest frugality—even of the severest mortification. He scarcely touched any of the choice dishes which were offered him, and only partook of the simplest and coarsest fare; at the beginning of the repast he moistened his lips in a cup of good wine, to seem to obey his doctor's prescriptions; but the rest of the time he only drank a little lukewarm water mingled with boiled herbs which rendered it still more insipid.

But his love of penance inspired other acts than those which were witnessed in the refectory. To the frequent discipline which, as we know, he had long since practised, he now joined iron chains and

a coarse hair shirt which covered him to his knees, and which, on account of the delicacy of his constitution, caused him painful and constant torture.

It can easily be supposed that the spirit, which had made him adopt such a régime and such practices, had also equally modified his occupations and the employment of his days, as well as the circle of his friends and ordinary relations. Learned readings and pious meditations had taken the place of hunting and sport. The Holy Scriptures in particular were his delight, and he studied them diligently under the direction of experienced doctors. For the courtiers and pleasure-seekers who had so long formed his favourite society he substituted a group of learned men, philosophers and theologians, who formed a kind of academy, whose memory historians have preserved, giving them the name of *eruditi.*

Does it not seem just to say after all this that he had really put off the old man? Such, however, was not the opinion of the austere and pious monks who composed the Chapter of the Primatial of Canterbury. It was with some misgivings, it must be remembered, that they had elected Thomas as Archbishop, as they had almost always had a member of their order as their Head. They had wished that in default of the religious profession the new Primate should at least adopt the monastic habit. He had not yet done so. And as at this time, there was as yet no uniform or obligatory dress for ecclesiastics, and they could only be distinguished from laymen by the tonsure,

he contented himself after his Ordination by wearing a long garment, sombre in hue, but of rich stuff adorned with costly furs. This gave an occasion for slanderers to repeat that a layman was seated on the throne of St Augustine. Wishing to put an end to what certain bigoted persons regarded as a scandal, the monks found a means of letting their complaints reach the Archbishop. At first he received them coldly enough. But after having reflected, he begged some of his friends, who persuaded him to yield in a certain measure for the sake of peace, to design a dress for him, which, without being quite like the monastic habit, should seem more appropriate to the successor of Lanfranc and Anselm. They made him one, on the model of that of the Canons Regular, much like that of his former masters at Merton. He adopted it, and the monks declared themselves satisfied.

This time the transformation was complete. Becket had hardly taken two months to bring it about. It was accomplished when on August 11th, 1162, John of Salisbury and his companions returned from Montpellier, bringing the pallium, which the Pope had willingly entrusted to them for the new Primate. Out of respect for this insignia, which represented to him both his new dignity and the personal favour of the Holy Father, Thomas advanced with bare feet clothed in the pontifical vestments towards his own ambassadors, whom he met under the porch of the cathedral. The pall was laid on the High Altar, from whence the new Archbishop took it himself during the singing of the Te Deum.

The enthronement took place afterwards. Becket's episcopate had really begun.

To inaugurate it, he made it his duty to redress a certain number of wrongs from which his See had suffered in the past; and from this time one could foresee how he would fill his rôle as representative and defender of the Church. Careful to instruct himself as to his duty, and determined to accomplish it to the very end, he avoided useless provocation, and never refused any concession which his conscience allowed. Many possessions belonging to Canterbury Cathedral, lands, domains and castles, had been unjustly alienated during Theobald's administration, and especially during his latter years. Becket did not feel he could let a heritage, which ages had transmitted to him, be thus impoverished, one which, especially in his hands, should be the patrimony of the poor, so he resolved to take the necessary steps for the property to be restored to the episcopal revenues. But their owners were, for the most part, powerful lords in the king's favour: the king himself through his exchequer had shared in these unjust spoliations. Before acting Becket wished to obtain Henry's authorization. The latter was still in Normandy, from whence, with much curiosity, he followed the new Archbishop's proceedings. They were generally represented to him under an unfavourable aspect by the courtiers who surrounded him, and who, being nearly all hostile to Becket, did not fail to jest about his conversion, which they taxed with hypocrisy, nor about the changes in his life and dress, in which they saw nothing but affecta-

tion. The monarch allowed none of his personal impressions to appear, and one wondered if, in spite of his attempts to hinder, at the last moment, the elevation of his former favourite, he still retained for him all his ancient friendship. He did not show himself vexed by the demand for authorization which Becket addressed to him, and he seemed to grant it graciously. However the moment soon came when the secret feelings of the monarch were to betray themselves for the first time.

On his accession to the See of Canterbury, Becket had still remained Chancellor of the kingdom. He felt that should he keep this office, he would have neither the leisure nor the independence and liberty of action necessary for the conscientious discharge of his duties as Archbishop. He therefore decided on giving up the Seals. Without waiting for the king's return, he sent his resignation to Normandy by Ernulf, Chancellor of the Primatial Church, who was to say—in order to explain his master's decision and get it accepted—that Becket, not considering himself equal to the duties of his new office, could not undertake two. This time Henry could not contain his astonishment and displeasure. All his calculations were baffled one after the other. He had flattered himself in fact to have always kept Becket in a state of dependence, as long as the bonds which attached him to the throne, in his office of Chancellor, were not broken. Thus Ernulf had hardly made known the object of his mission, when the king, interrupting him, exclaimed angrily, "Par les oilz Dieu![1]

[1] "Par les yeux de Dieu!" Henry II.'s favourite oath.

will he not keep the seals? But I have letters and documents in my possession authorizing him to be both Chancellor and Archbishop."—"My master cannot suffice for two such heavy burdens," gently replied Ernulf; "he has already more than enough to do as Archbishop."—"Say rather," answered Henry sharply, "that he no longer cares for my service; this is a good proof of it." However, after this violent tirade the king decided still to dissimulate, at least until his return to England.

It was not long before he went back. At the end of the year 1162, marked by such grave events for Becket, Henry crossed the sea and landed just before Christmas Eve at Southampton. The Primate went to meet him with his pupil, the young Prince Henry. They had not seen each other again since their conversation at the castle of Falaise. What reception would Becket, who in the interval had become, it was said, quite another man, receive from Henry, who, according to many people, believed himself betrayed by his former favourite? The courtiers were all on the alert, trying to find in the words and attitude of the king a presage for the future. Scarcely had Henry dismounted when he advanced towards the Archbishop. As if he did not perceive his son's presence, all his attentions and caresses were for Becket. At most, he only allowed himself a glance and a slightly ironical remark about his new costume. At the same time, observant and well-informed persons, and such are never wanting at a court, remarked that directly he had given him the kiss of peace,

he abruptly turned away his face.[1] The next day they set out for London. As in former times when he was in favour, Becket rode alone by the king's side; the escort of courtiers and guards followed at a certain distance. The two cavaliers conversed with much animation and cordiality. This made the majority think that nothing was changed in their former intimacy. But those courtiers who were physiognomists fancied they remarked in the prince certain signs such as the pursing up of his lips, a certain contraction of the muscles of his face, which revealed his inmost soul, and showed only too clearly that this friendly air was but simulated or the effect of politic calculation. That which they could not succeed in guessing was the subject on which the two were conversing. They were able to do so some days later when they learnt that Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of Hereford, was going to leave his diocese for that of London. Henry II. could no longer be mistaken as to the character and sentiments of Thomas à Becket; he understood that he must look elsewhere to find an instrument capable of docilely executing his plans against the Church. He believed—with reason this time—to have found it in the person of the Bishop of Hereford, whom he wished to raise first of all to a more important see, that he might be more able to counterbalance the prestige and authority of the Primate. But similar translations were at that time very rare, and to obtain the

[1] Matthieu Paris, *Grande-chronique*, trad. Huillard-Bréholles, vol. i. p. 408.

one in question from the Sovereign Pontiff, the king needed Becket's aid. Would the latter give it, and would he not remember that the Bishop of Hereford was the only one among those assembled at Westminster who had shown himself hostile to his election? For Becket's generous soul this same remembrance was a motive for giving the co-operation asked of him. Besides he was too noble to foresee all the treachery of which Gilbert would later on be capable either towards the Church or himself. So, faithful to his resolution not to oppose uselessly the Sovereign's wishes, he promised to write to the Pope, and he did so in terms which must have been efficacious in obtaining the desired consent. We shall see later how his good offices were rewarded.

Thus ended the year 1162 for Thomas à Becket. The following one was to see the birth of the tragic conflict, which was only terminated by the martyrdom of the champion of the rights and liberties of the Church. It opened, however, under auspices which might have apparently made the Primate hope for a more tranquil and honoured Episcopate. At the commencement of 1163 Alexander published a decree, announcing that a Council would be held at Tours, in the second fortnight of May. To this, with the king's permission, Becket went. Such were the consideration, the honour, the marks of esteem and veneration lavished on him by all the members of the Council, and by the Holy Father himself, that one might have been tempted to take him for the chief personage

after the Sovereign Pontiff, in that august assembly. On the rumour of his approach, all the Cardinals who were there hastened to go and meet him, except two who remained with Alexander, lest he should be entirely deserted by his court. The Primate made his way at once to the Pope's dwelling, where he arrived, followed by an extraordinary procession, in which the common people elbowed the Princes of the Church ; for in proportion as he advanced the citizens, who stood along his passage in order to catch a glimpse of such a celebrated man, gradually mingled with the Cardinals, Bishops and dignitaries of the regular and secular clergy, who had gone out beyond the gates to receive him. The Pope at once gave him an audience, and welcomed him with eagerness and kindness, and with marks of sympathy and consideration which were not only addressed to his high dignity, but chiefly to his person.

It has been truly said that the Council of Tours was not without influence on Becket's after conduct.[1] In fact the trials of the Church were more than once discussed, and resolutions were proposed with the view of defending her against the attempts of these temporal princes, who in several countries of Europe, and in England especially, were trying to enslave her. Arnulf, Bishop of Lisieux, the orator charged with pronouncing the opening discourse, exhorted his colleagues to remember that they were not simply bishops in order to enjoy rich benefices, to occupy the chief place in

[1] Mgr. Darboy, *St Thomas Becket*, t. i. p. 378.

the assembly of the faithful, to bless the crowds kneeling at their feet, but that it was their duty and mission to protect and extend the inheritance of Jesus Christ were it at the price of their blood; and to fortify them against the temptations of cowardice or discouragement: "We have on our side," he exclaimed, "the inhabitants of heaven; we have your merits and your piety; we have for us nearly all those who bear the name of Christians."

Thomas must have profited by these words, but there was another cause which he had also much at heart. Since he had ranked among the successors of St Anselm, foreseeing that he would have to undergo the same struggle with worldly power, he had chosen him as the model and patron of his own episcopate, and his dearest wish was that he should be raised to the altars as soon as possible. Now, quite recently, by virtue of a decree issued by Alexander III., the Holy See had reserved to itself the privilege of awarding these supreme honours to the servants of God. And it was usually by the voice of solemn Councils, like that of Tours, that it proclaimed them worthy of public veneration. Becket then thought it was a fitting opportunity to obtain the realization of his most fervent desire; consequently he charged John of Salisbury to trace in a few pages a picture of the virtues of this illustrious and valiant bishop. There already existed a life of St Anselm, the work of his intimate friend and adviser, the monk Eadmer. John only abridged this, as he says, in his preface. For the

rest, his pious and touching recital may well edify contemporary readers; but, as regards Anselm's glory, it did not have the effect which Thomas à Becket desired. Too many pre-occupations already absorbed the mind of Alexander III.; his soul was filled with too many other cares and anxieties; he received the Primate's request with great benevolence, and also the book which he presented; he responded by some encouraging words, but adjourned any definite decision. Three centuries were to elapse before Alexander VI. placed Anselm on the list of the Saints.

Directly after the close of the Council, Thomas returned to England, and almost immediately entered into conflict with Henry II. The contemporaries of Thomas à Becket are pleased to establish a parallel between his long sufferings and Our Saviour's passion. One may say that his triumphal entry into Tours and his sojourn in this town, where he saw himself so honoured by the Fathers of the Council and the whole populace, was his Palm Sunday, which very shortly preceded those painful scenes, in which he too was to know the treason of false brethren, the desertion of cowardly friends, the appearance before corrupt judges, the sarcasms and calumnies of spiteful and jealous minds, and the persecutions and violence of a suspicious and despotic power.

CHAPTER V

RUPTURE BETWEEN THOMAS À BECKET AND HENRY II—ITS ORIGIN—COUNCILS OF WESTMINSTER, CLARENDON AND NORTHAMPTON — FLIGHT OF BECKET TO FRANCE

1163—1164

GREAT things often spring from trivial causes. Two ecclesiastics having been tried and sentenced on what appeared insufficient grounds, they were by the king's orders claimed by the secular tribunals, while Becket, relying upon the rights of the Church, refused to give them up. Such was the double spark which kindled such an immense fire, and provoked a terrible duel, which for seven years was the great event in England and passionately interested the whole of Europe.

But before retracing the principal stages of this stirring drama, it will be necessary to glance at the two personages who occupied the foreground, and to see what were the character, motives and designs of both, in the conflict in which they were engaged.

Thomas à Becket is already well known to us. His conversion or rather his change of habits and mode of life, directly after his elevation to the Episcopate, has been differently interpreted. We shall not stay to refute those who see nothing in it

but hypocrisy and vulgar ambition. All that we know of him contradicts such an accusation. On the other hand, it would not suffice to merely say that he acted as a man of tact and judgment, understanding that if public opinion had been able to tolerate in a simple clerk those worldly manners, which were almost forced on him by his frequentation of the court and the necessity of pleasing the king, it would severely condemn them in an Archbishop, who owed it to his office and to his people, to honour the one and edify the other, by the religious gravity of his life. One of his contemporaries has well shown us the principal and true motive which guided his actions. "In his ordination," says Guillaume, fils d'Etienne,[1] "Thomas à Becket received, under the visible sign of the Sacrament, the invisible unction of divine grace, which entirely penetrated his soul; and putting off the man of the world he put on Jesus Christ: we then see the Chancellor with his worldly tastes disappear, and his only care was to become a saintly Archbishop." Indeed in this soul, which had remained pure, which evil had neither soiled nor obscured, the action of the Holy Spirit encountered no obstacle; and He was pleased to shed His gifts there in liberal measure. We may be reminded at this point of an interpretation both ingenious and mystical, which St Gregory the Great gives of two texts in the first book of Kings, and apply it to this circumstance in our hero's life. Comparing the very different destinies and reigns of Saul and David, St Gregory says that the former

[1] Ap. Migne, *loc. cit.* col. 124.

had only received an insufficient grace, figured by the small measure of oil (*lenticulam olei*) which Samuel, by God's orders, had used in anointing him, and that David had received the plenitude of grace at his anointing, which is shown to us in the command made to the prophet to fill a vase entirely with oil (*Imple cornu tuum oleo*), and to pour it over the prince's head. It was this full and abundant measure which Becket, in his turn, received both at his sacerdotal ordination and at his episcopal consecration, and which caused him to esteem all earthly interests as nothing compared with those of the sanctuary. At the same time he felt himself endued with a superhuman strength, that rendered him capable of all the self-denial and sacrifice which are the prelude of God's absolute reign in a soul. It is also in this light and in this strength that we must seek for the true secret of his new attitude with regard to the king, and of that inflexible firmness with which he knew how, in the midst of the faltering and hesitation of his weaker brethren, to oppose to him the *non possumus* of Christian faith and courage raised to heroism by his love of God and the Church. Let us not, however, forget that, in the very midst of his most obstinate resistance to the unjust claims of his adversaries, he never lost the spirit of merciful condescension which we have noticed as a great feature in his character. We shall soon see that he once carried it so far, that he afterwards experienced the most painful remorse. His scruples then drew from him such tears as must have washed away his guilt in the eyes of God, if

indeed he had been as culpable as he believed. He had imbibed this spirit from the Gospel, and he owed it to the lessons and example of the Divine Master, Who wills not that one should break the broken reed nor quench the smoking flax. But we do not fear to add that it was also inspired by his sincere and faithful attachment to the king. He had been placed near him when Henry was scarcely twenty years old. He had been given to him as a tutor, quite as much as a minister, and the affection which from that time he naturally conceived for his royal pupil, was but nourished and fortified by his long and intimate intercourse with a prince, who, to terrible faults, joined real and brilliant qualities.

Henry II. had from childhood a quick and lively disposition, a joyous humour, and a robust and indefatigable temperament. His mind was cultivated for the time in which he lived: as a child, he learnt everything he pleased, and remembered all he learnt; he read a great deal in his youth, and never forgot anything he read. It was enough for him to have seen a person but once to remember his features and name. To this gift, so precious in a king, he joined the art of pleasing by his witty sallies and of flattering by his caresses, in which at times he put so much grace and fitness that one was tempted to take them as the expression of a sincere and affectionate sentiment, of which it may be said he was not capable. In physique he resembled, like most of his ancestors, William the Conqueror. He was of medium height and excessive corpulence, which was almost an infirmity, and which he tried to reduce

by violent exercises and an activity which gave no repose either to himself or others. He was the despair of his courtiers, who were obliged to remain standing during the longest audiences, and who, when hardly seated at table, were often forced to rise at his signal to follow him to the chase or to war. This iron constitution was also a great resource to him in his kingly office, especially at an epoch in which brute force was all powerful, and the fate of nations was oftener decided on the field of battle than in the cabinets of diplomatists. Is it not also to this temperament that we must attribute, at least partly, those passions and vices which counterbalanced his natural gifts and personal charm? His disordered love of pleasure was only equalled by his proneness to anger. In him, this last passion amounted almost to frenzy. One day, being contradicted by one of his courtiers, he burst into a torrent of abuse, then, overcome by a paroxysm of rage, he was seen to tear in pieces the draperies and hangings which were near him, and at last to roll on the ground, gnawing the mats which covered the floor. If he could not endure that any one should differ from him, still less did he understand that one dared to cross his plans or hesitate to obey him. In his dominions he admitted of no other authority than his own, unless it were one that proceeded directly from him, and was only exercised under his orders and control. It was this, no doubt, which was one cause of his struggle with the Church. When he encountered this spiritual power that claimed to censure his actions and oppose his designs, he

regarded it as seditious, and thought he had a right to treat it as such, even in the person of its highest earthly representative. Unfortunately he was not the only one who reasoned thus in Great Britain, which at that period, and even before this, seemed at times to be on the verge of the Schism which was consummated four centuries later. Her geographical position appears to have somewhat aided this. It is true that the English were no longer in that isolation, which in ancient times had kept them separated from the rest of the world :—

Et penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.[1]

Still this verse had not yet become a pure anachronism. In the domain of religion especially, the relations of the Pope with the English, were more difficult and less constant than with the other Catholic countries of Europe. One is tempted at times to believe that this nation, which in the following century Gregory IX. by a flattering and complaisant hyperbole called "the most illustrious member of the Church's Body,"[2] profited by its distance from the Head to escape somewhat from its influence. The Norman invasion had not modified this state of things. The Bishops had become more and more the vassals of the king, for many of them were more like barons than prelates, the feudal bond being stronger than that which bound them to the Roman Hierarchy, and their obedience to the king came before that which they

[1] Virgil, *Ecl.* I. v. 67.

[2] Matthew Paris, *Grande Chronique*, vol. iii. p. 407.

professed towards the Sovereign Pontiff. When in the midst of this almost universal servitude, Henry saw Thomas à Becket rise up and oppose him in the name of a power both foreign and superior to his own, his astonishment and indignation were extreme. He had also really loved the Chancellor, but with a selfish and interested affection, for the pleasure which he enjoyed in the conversation of a man who was such good company, and especially for the honour which reverted to him from the success of his great and magnificent minister. From the moment in which these elements were wanting, such a friendship soon turned to hatred, and the day came when Becket's prediction was fulfilled, and when the king himself exclaimed: "All is over between that man and me."

We have said that two incidents of no great importance hastened the rupture. In the latter part of the year 1163 the royal judges, by Henry's order, and at the instigation of his agents, had tried several times to contest the right of judging clerics suspected of any crimes or of more or less grave offences in the ecclesiastical courts. Two of these were accused, but not convicted, of homicide. Owing to Thomas à Becket, who justly considered himself the national protector of the rights of the Church throughout the whole realm, the episcopal courts, to which the two accused were answerable, hastened to cite them to their bar. One of them, a clerk in the diocese of Worcester, against whom, as far as we can judge from history, no decisive proof was alleged, was condemned to the severest penalty which a Churchman could

undergo. The other was pronounced innocent; but some time after, a sheriff having claimed to re-open the case and convict him of the murder which was falsely imputed to him, this priest, a Canon of Bedford of noble birth named Philippe de Brois, was so incensed against the magistrate that he insulted him publicly with the greatest arrogance. On this count he was condemned by the judges of the Primatial Court to one year's banishment, and to be deprived for the same length of time of the fruits of his benefice. But the king, who had shown the greatest interest in both these affairs, and saw in them an opportunity to enter openly into war with the Church, professed himself dissatisfied. In fact he had something else in view than to correct this double judgment of the ecclesiastical tribunals, or to avenge the outrage offered to one of his officers. The end he pursued was the servitude of the Church in England and the destruction of her privileges.

However, taking these different incidents as a pretext, he caused it to be announced that a Parliament of Bishops and nobles would be held on the 1st of October at Westminster. Scarcely was it assembled when Henry threw off the mask, and showed what were his real intentions. He said nothing of the clerk of Worcester nor of the Canon of Bedford. But, launching forth first of all into violent recrimination against the excessive laxity of the ecclesiastical courts, he pretended that it encouraged offences and crimes which became more and more frequent among the clergy of England, and that to put an end to so many scandals, it was

urgent to restrain the rights and privileges of a too easy and too partial jurisdiction, and to declare that in future any clerk found guilty would be degraded by the Episcopal Court, and handed over to the secular arm to be submitted to the punishment decreed by the common law. On hearing this discourse, great were the surprise and embarrassment of the Bishops. In their name Thomas à Becket demanded permission to reflect—to discuss the matter together, and that the solution of so grave a question should be deferred to the next day. Henry, having refused to grant so long a delay, the Primate retired with his suffragans, to deliberate on the answer which he should make to the royal proposition. The majority of the Bishops were inclined to yield to the monarch's exigencies, fearing to rouse his anger, and under the pretext that a priest whose sense of dignity did not restrain him from doing wrong, deserved to be treated with more rigour than a layman.

Becket had no difficulty in answering and refuting them. Certainly the faults of a priest are all the more grave because his character is more sacred. But that is no reason for infringing, to his detriment, a rule of natural equity, recognized in all times and places, by which the same man cannot be twice condemned and punished for the same offence. That would be the case if a clerk, after having undergone canonical degradation, which entailed on him the loss of his honour and often of his means of subsistence, should afterwards be obliged to appear before the royal judges, and to hear himself con-

demned by them to more or less severe corporal punishment. It is true that the Canon Law declared that an ecclesiastic regularly deposed for a first offence should lose his "benefice of clergy." But it was clearly the thought of this legislator that the same ecclesiastic, in case of a fresh offence, should no longer have the privilege of being judged by his peers and would become amenable to the ordinary tribunals; still it nowise ordained that the latter should have the right to revive as it were at their bar, a crime already expiated, in order to punish it a second time. After having thus refuted this weak argument Becket enlarged the scope of the debate, and coming to the consequences of the measure proposed to them, he easily showed that it would in fact end in nothing less than suppressing all ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the offices and sentences of which would become illusive. By this, not only the Church would be violently and unjustly deprived of a privilege and exemption which she had possessed for many centuries throughout the whole of Christendom, but the cause of humanity would also receive a sensible and regrettable blow. At this epoch in fact, when so many remains of barbarism were still struggling against the progress of growing civilization, the jurisprudence in force in the secular tribunals was simply a confused mass of *customs* borrowed from the different peoples whose successive invasions had by degrees formed the greater part of the nations of Europe, and the exorbitant penalties imposed by the tyrannical caprice of kings or barons were arbitrarily applied by the venality

and passion of their agents, to such a point that the simplest offences of the chase, the killing of a deer or a snare unlawfully set in the royal forest was punished by the mutilation of limbs or the loss of life. The ecclesiastical tribunals, where sat judges learned, disinterested and accessible to pity then seemed to be the only refuge of humane and impartial justice, and the one hope for the future. Thus it was not rare for lay litigants to solicit the favour of being judged in the episcopal courts, if only by some juridical interpretation their suit could be made to fall under a case foreseen by Canon Law. After having thus exposed his arguments before his suffragans, Becket, not content with addressing himself to their reason in order to try and convince them, desired to appeal to their hearts, and to make them ashamed of that cowardly fear which kept them miserably in suspense between the duty of defending the Church, whose honour and interests were in their hands, and the danger of offending a prince whose vengeance they feared. "I see," he exclaimed, "that you easily choose the part of feebleness and indolence, and that provided you call these by the false name of prudence you are quite resigned to let the liberty of the Church be stifled. Who then has been able to fascinate you to such a degree, rash prelates? What use is it to try to disguise under a borrowed title, that which would be manifestly an iniquity on your part? Is it wisdom to consent to the total ruin of the Church of Christ? Let things be called by their real name, and do not try to pervert both their sense and meaning.

When you say one must consider the misfortunes of the time, I do not contradict you, provided always that it be not by heaping crime upon crime. Is not God able to better the condition of Church without condemning us to dishonour ourselves? Is He then so powerless that His Holy Church cannot be saved except by the abasement of her Doctors? No doubt God is sending you trials, but when should Bishops be willing to affront danger? Is it during times of peace and tranquillity? You dare not maintain this. It is when the Church is shaken by the tempest that it is the duty of her Pastors to combat the peril. Be assured that the Bishops of the first centuries have not deserved more of the Church by cementing her foundation with their blood, than we ourselves should do to-day by giving our lives to defend her liberty."[1]

Overcome by this virile and generous eloquence the Bishops could not help agreeing that the claims of the king were quite inadmissible. They therefore begged Thomas to be their interpreter, and to repeat to Henry, in their name, the discourse which he had just addressed to themselves; they then resumed their session.

Great was the prince's anger when he learned through the Primate, the result of the Bishops' conference. Having besides nothing to answer to the reasons on which their refusal was based, he contented himself with saying, when Becket had ceased to speak: "At least, promise me to observe the "customs" of the kingdom as they were in force

[1] Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, ap. Migne, t. cit. col. 129.

in the reign of my ancestor, Henry I." This was making no concession; on the contrary, either by design or out of revenge for the unexpected resistance which he had encountered, or in spite of himself, and urged on by his anger, Henry took a step forward on the path of his persecution of the Church. The promise which he exacted from the Bishops was all the more grave and dangerous because it was so vague and undefined. What in reality were these "customs" through which he meant to triumph over them? One knew nothing of any such collection; there was no written code of them existing. It was useless to seek for them among those ancient usages, a species of tacit but sacred agreements, which one never thought of drawing up and embodying in the form of a code, but which were nevertheless engraved in the memory, and as it were an integral part in the conscience of the people. If one follows the religious policy of the kings who had reigned in England since the Norman Conquest, nothing could be more arbitrary and capricious than their conduct towards the Church; not only did they think it no harm to disavow and contradict each other, but they perpetually reversed their own judgments, contradicting themselves. We see that their one custom, their unique law, is their own pleasure. To submit to this fresh claim of Henry II. would have been to put the Church entirely at his mercy. Measuring at a glance the extent of the peril, Thomas à Becket replied that he would observe "the royal customs except when touching his honour

or the rights of his Order": *Salvo ordine suo.*[1] "There is venom in these words," answered the prince angrily.

Henry then made a last effort to persuade the Bishops to separate from the Primate, and to swear to observe the "customs" without restriction or reserve. But they were still under the influence of the brave and ardent exhortation of Becket, and sustained besides by his presence, carried away by his example, they all used the same formula as he did with one exception, Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, who spoke last, and was mean enough to say that he would observe the customs "in good faith." But at least he did not at once receive the price of his treachery. Whether, blinded by his fury, the king did not seize the sense of the terms employed by Hilary, or whether the submission of one only seemed to weigh too little in the balance against the resistance of all the others: "It is a real plot," he exclaimed, his eyes blazing with anger. Then as the day was declining, he brought the meeting to a close, and withdrew, uttering threats against the Bishops. Next morning, at day break, he sent to demand of the Archbishop the restitution of the castles and fiefs which he had received in his quality of Chancellor, and which were still in his possession. Becket hastened to comply with this request, and the king at once quitted London without taking leave of the Bishops or consenting to receive one of them.

[1] This was the formula, used by the Bishops at the ceremony of their consecration, when taking an oath of fidelity to the King of England.

War was openly declared. These Bishops, who the eve before had shown themselves so courageous, were now frightened, and one saw "the pillars of the Church bending themselves like reeds at the first breath of the storm."[1] Henry's sudden departure made them fear everything from his resentment. Then among these trembling and frightened prelates the only question was, as to who should first retract the unlucky restriction which had so irritated the king and should hasten to observe the "customs" unconditionally and in good faith. But what Henry wanted was the retractation of Becket himself. To make him waver the king began by taking rigorous measures against the Archbishop's best friend. John of Salisbury was exiled, and a few days after the Westminster Assembly was obliged to leave England and seek refuge in France. He had long been considered suspect by the monarch. Already, some years previously, while Thomas was Chancellor, John had just escaped being banished from his country a first time, as Henry had accused him of being the only one of his subjects who dared to defy the Royal Majesty, and he had made him responsible for the resistance which he was beginning to encounter in his first attempts to encroach on the rights of the Church.[2] The sentence of banishment was not pronounced at that time, thanks no doubt to the intervention of the Chancellor. In renewing it, and having it executed the day after the

[1] Ozanam, *Deux chanceliers d'Angleterre*, p. 13 f.

[2] It is John of Salisbury himself who gives us this explanation of his first disgrace. *Salisb. epist.* 15, ed. by Giles, t. i. p. 164.

Westminster Assembly, the king wished at the same time to punish Thomas by thus attacking him through one for whom he had the deepest affection, and to render him more vulnerable by depriving him of his most trusted counsellor and of his chief support. But John of Salisbury had said at the time of his first disgrace, and à propos of the old Primate Theobald whom he was accused of keeping in tutelage: "Has the Archbishop of Canterbury then need of me to know his duty?"[1] Might he not have repeated these words in connection with Thomas à Becket now he was really on the road to exile?

The latter showed no signs of yielding after the departure of his adviser. The king sent one messenger after another to him. They at first tried threats. According to them the king was resolved to stop at nothing in order to efface the insult which he had just received at Westminster; Becket should submit willingly, to avoid being broken by force, and they added that he ought not to delay in giving full and entire satisfaction, as it was a question of his peace and security and perhaps even of his life.

When they saw him thus inaccessible to fear, they changed their tactics. Henry, whom they had just described as a vindictive and bloodthirsty tyrant, they now represented as the most gentle and conciliating of men. According to them he now recognized that he ought not to change anything in the organization of the Church of England, nor retrench or lessen her immunities and privileges.

[1] *Ibid.*

Only at Westminster he had experienced a humiliating defeat. For the honour of the crown he ought not to remain in this undignified attitude, and he could only be reinstated by overtures from those who had so openly resisted him, and who would come and protest at his feet their deference for his person and their obedience to his orders. This apology would be purely a form, and have no practical consequences, or in any way compromise the future. The prince promised never to use it as a weapon against the rights of the episcopate and the clergy, which should be respected. Thus the royal dignity would be saved, and the Church would suffer no harm. These words seemed reassuring, but Becket's sense of honesty revolted from playing this comedy, and besides he knew Henry II. well, and how little reliance could be placed in his promises. Had he not one day said in justification of his too well known duplicity, that "it was better to disavow his words than his actions, to be guilty of falsehood rather than let his favourite plans miscarry."[1] The Archbishop was right then, in replying to Hilary of Chichester, who, in spite of his odious behaviour in Parliament, had not feared to make himself, in this circumstance, the prince's interpreter, "You wish us to exchange promises with the king, be assured that he will demand the fulfilment of ours; but how shall we oblige him to keep his own?"

Finding him so inflexible, Henry's agents decided to have recourse to a method of attack against which a man of honour is hardly ever sufficiently on his

[1] Lingard, *History of England*, chap. xii.

guard. With unspeakable perfidy, they presented Thomas with some Apostolical letters, evidently fabricated, in which Alexander's language was in manifest contradiction with his well-known sentiments towards the Primate, as well as his opinion on the subject of the dispute then waging between the Church and Crown in England, sentiments which he had already manifested at the Council of Tours, and which, in future, we shall often find expressed in the Pope's conversations and correspondence.[1] He was now made to say that in the troubled state of the Church, it was necessary to close one's eyes to certain abuses in the interests of peace, and to yield a little as regarded his rights, that also the struggle, now raging in Great Britain between the two powers, was as yet but a spark and easily extinguished if one only acted with prudence and address, but it was ready to kindle a wide-spread conflagration if one insisted on irritating the amour-propre of the sovereign. The conclusion was that Becket ought to yield, and without delay carry his submission to the king. This time, the Archbishop was conquered. His generosity prevented him from suspecting the felony of his adversaries; his respect for the person, the judgment, and the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff did not allow him for an instant to let his own views weigh against those represented

[1] Unfortunately for these pretended Apostolical letters and for the historians who have tried to give them as authentic, they have entirely disappeared, and whilst all the other documents of the process have been faithfully preserved, not a fragment of these letters remains that can be urged in favour of these presumptions, from which it results, according to us, that they were apocryphal.

to him as being the opinion and wishes of Alexander. He therefore submitted, and went to see the king. who was at this moment staying at Woodstock.

Henry received him courteously, but with an assumed coldness. He told him that he accepted his excuses for the past and his promises for the future, but that, the insult having been public, the reparation ought to be so also, and that he desired that it should be solemnly renewed before a Parliament of bishops and barons, which he intended to convoke directly in one of his royal residences. This language and attitude surprised Becket, and awakened his suspicions. But faithful to his habit of exhausting every means of conciliation before coming to an open rupture, he agreed to go to the proposed assembly when the king had fixed on the time and place where it was to be held.

It met in the last fortnight of January 1164, in the Castle of Clarendon. If Becket still cherished any illusions when going there he soon lost them. All that he saw and heard revealed only too plainly the real intentions of the king. The royal manor resounded on all sides with the noise of arms, and one saw none but knights and soldiers in armour, who passed and repassed before the Primate, regarding him with a suspicious air, and seeming to threaten him with their drawn swords. The speeches of the courtiers, and even of some of the bishops won over to the king's cause, were no less disquieting. It was not to be tolerated, said they, that a man who owed all to the sovereign, whom the latter had raised from mediocrity to the highest power and honour, should

continue to brave him with an insolence which deserved the severest punishments. Thomas à Becket could no longer doubt that he had been drawn into a snare, in which they hoped to see him fall, and with him the privileges and independence of the English Church. In these conditions was he not released from all his promises which had been extorted from him by ruse? His enemies noticed his hesitation, and again did all in their power to intimidate him and to prevent any resistance on his part. As on the day following the Westminster Assembly, they commenced by threatening him with the vengeance of a prince who might not stop even at blood-shedding: "In heaven's name, save your life," they said to him, "and the lives of those who have accompanied you here. Take pity on us. If the king does not receive prompt and full satisfaction, we shall be obliged to obey him and at the price of what a crime!"—"It would not be an unheard-of thing," tranquilly replied Becket, "that an Archbishop should die in defence of the rights of the Church. How many holy Pontiffs have given us this example in the past. It will be as God wills." Disconcerted by such intrepidity, Henry's messengers retired, and were followed by one of Becket's friends, a man noted for his great probity, Richard of Hastings, Grand Master of the Templars in England. He came to renew, in the king's name, the promises of which Becket had already once been a dupe, and which had ended, thanks to the infamous treachery of which we have spoken, in leading him docile or resigned to Woodstock. The

Grand Master begged him to give the prince the satisfaction he required, repeating that it was simply a question of mere form. After all, what was it in reality? An act of quite platonic submission; a formula of respect and deference to be pronounced before the Parliament, after which all would be finished, and the "customs" would never again be mentioned. "I affirm this on my honour," added Richard; "I swear it on my soul."

But did not the result of his interview at Woodstock, and the spectacle which Becket had before his eyes on his arrival at Clarendon, seem to discredit beforehand all these assurances and promises, and denounce them as illusory? In any case, out of respect for the character of him who now made himself their interpreter, and seconded them with such solemn oaths, the Primate desired to make a last effort and a last sacrifice, though probably without much confidence or hope.

He therefore approached the throne on which the king was sitting, and in the midst of the profound silence of the whole assembly, he pronounced slowly and in a low voice the following words: "Sire, if the dispute which has divided us had to do with my personal rights, I should not for an instant have thought of resisting your will. But it concerns the Church, and all that is most dear to her. I shall render account to God in such a grave matter, and God is an inexorable judge. You ought not then to be surprised if I have shown some hesitation. But now that the Church will be treated with all due respect and honour, I willingly accede to what is

asked of me in your majesty's name, and I promise, 'in good faith,' to observe the customs of the realm." It was not long before one saw that the visible doubt underlying these words was only too well justified. Scarcely had Becket finished speaking when the king exclaimed in imperious tones: "You have all heard the Archbishop's promise: it only remains for him to order the other Bishops to repeat, each for himself, the same declaration."— "Let them do so," answered Becket. Then began the procession of Bishops, who each in turn came to the foot of the throne and recited the prescribed formula. When they had finished, Henry again spoke: "You are all of you witnesses," said he, "of the promise given by the Primate and Bishops to faithfully observe, in future, the laws and customs of the kingdom. Desirous of ending all misconception and dispute possible on this subject, I wish that the oldest and wisest of my Barons should at once draw up, with the aid of my clerks, a code of these customs and laws, such as they were recognised in the reign of my grandfather Henry I." Thus Henry II. no longer troubled even to feign: he openly declared that the prelates' oaths would not remain a dead letter as he had promised, and that these customs of which, after the satisfaction he had just obtained, there ought to have been no longer any question, were to be officially and without delay promulgated and put in force.

But what showed above all the odious duplicity of the prince was that these barons and clerks charged by him with collecting the pretended "customs" of

his grandfather in order to fix their definite enactment, re-entered the meeting after scarcely a few minutes' delay, bringing with them a long charter in sixteen articles which it would have been impossible to compile and transcribe in so short a time. Thus the work had been done beforehand, and had probably been executed by the king's orders, at the very moment when his promises and repeated assurances to hold these famous customs as obsolete, appeared to render it useless.

Thomas could no longer hesitate as to the part he had to take. But wishing to avoid too violent a scene after those which had just taken place, he observed, that, as a newly-appointed Bishop, he could not be sufficiently *au courant* of these "customs" which were to be revived and needed some delay in order to study them,—that besides, it was getting late, and it would be preferable to postpone to the morrow the examination of so important a matter. To the surprise of all, the king made no objection to this request, and consented to dismiss the meeting.

The next day, as soon as the Parliament had met, they commenced the reading of the Sixteen Articles. They were a confused medley of ancient customs, for the most part fallen into desuetude, and of enactments equally forgotten which had only for a brief time had the force of law, under those princes most hostile to religion, such as William Rufus and Henry Beauclerk; lastly, there were new clauses evolved from the brain of Henry II. and his legists, and these were among the most tyrannical. The whole formed a system of jurisprudence, absolutely

destructive of all the liberties of the Church. For the latter there was henceforth no more freedom of jurisdiction: the ecclesiastical tribunals existed only in name, having no other rôle or right than to declare if the clergy were guilty or not, and, if in the affirmative case, to degrade them and give them up afterwards to the secular power. There were no penalties, not even those whose character was most exclusively spiritual, over which the tribunals did not pretend to exercise their control or put their veto. The tenants of the crown, the officers of the royal household, could not be excommunicated, nor their lands laid under an interdict without the consent of the king, who thus, one may say, wielded both swords. There was no longer any freedom of election: was it a question of a nomination to a bishopric or an abbey? it was in the king's chapel and under his eyes and surveillance that the electors designed by him were to discuss the titles of the candidates and to choose, very often, not the most worthy, but the most pleasing to an all-powerful master. There was no more any personal liberty for high ecclesiastical dignitaries who could not leave England without the king's permission. Arguing from the principle that the domains of archbishoprics and abbeys were to be considered as baronial estates, and the titulars of these great offices as the immediate tenants of the crown, Henry conferred on them the same honours as the lay and military aristocracy, but only the better to subject them to all its obligations towards the king their suzerain. Suppose for instance that the latter were on unfriendly terms with the Pope

at the moment when a Council was convoked, he could forbid his Bishop, under the severest penalties, to go to it. All communication with the centre of Catholicity was broken. And this entirely feudal Church, which Henry Plantagenet thus dreamt of and sketched in outline in the Constitutions of Clarendon, appeared really detached from the great Christian community and imprisoned in the limits of the kingdom.

To subscribe to the Sixteen Articles would have been to sign the decay and servitude of the English Church. Who could suspect Becket of being thus forgetful of his duties and dignity? It was useless to urge that he ought to keep his promise to the king after the latter had broken his own in so cynical a manner. Nor could one pretend that he was bound by the Pope's letter. Apart from all question of its authenticity, if Alexander had written it, it was because he had first of all been deceived, both as to the nature of the promise required and that of the pretended customs.

The king had ordered three copies of the Constitution to be drawn up, one for the Primate, one for the Archbishop of York, while the third was to be placed in the archives of the realm. Henry had them presented for the signature of the Bishops, begging them to affix their seals. But Becket rising, declared: "I had received from the king the assurance that he asked nothing of me but a simple mark of deference, and that being given, and the royal honour satisfied, one would never put the customs into writing, nor should there be any further

mention of them. I have done what was asked of me: it was already too much, and I regret it. But by the Lord Almighty, while I live, seal of mine shall never be affixed to such a chart!" Nevertheless he took the copy intended for him, saying: "I accept it in order to have in my hands an authentic proof of the evil designs formed against the Church."

Such was Thomas à Becket's conduct in this too celebrated an assembly, which ought to be known in history as the "Clarendon fraud." And it is this which, wrongly as we think, has been termed Becket's fall, as if he had really and from fear, accepted the Sixteen Articles. But he never did so at any moment, or under any form. His only fault was that he lent himself, too easily perhaps, to this comedy of adhesion and to the *amende honorable*, imagined by the cunning of his enemies, which, according to their repeated protestations, was to be of no real consequence, and was to have none other effect, than to satisfy, in the eyes of the people, the wounded amour-propre of the sovereign. Again, Becket had only consented because they had made him believe that such was the wish of the Pope. But if we unhesitatingly absolve him, his own conscience judged him more severely. While journeying back from Clarendon, which he had left directly after his refusal to sign the Constitutions of Henry II., he retraced in memory all the incidents in which he had just been actor and witness. This twofold submission, which had been so treacherously wrested from him, inspired him with the most bitter remorse. He well knew that it was

due solely to the bad faith of his enemies, that it was legally null and invalid, and could never be seriously alleged either against him or against the Church. But he also knew that the people are never prone to discriminate nicely. In their eyes he must seem to have really and deliberately adhered to the customs, and if he had afterwards disavowed them, his retractation could only add to his guilt, and make them regard him as faithless to his word. He had thus betrayed the cause that he ought to have defended, and was himself dishonoured. His mind was agitated by these thoughts during the whole of his homeward way, and on arriving at Canterbury, his soul was a prey to the most agonizing torture. To those who tried to console him, he answered: "Do you not see that through my fault the Church of England is in peril? This Church which my predecessors governed with so much prudence, for whose defence they so valiantly combated, and which they made triumph over so many enemies, will be, thanks to me, reduced to servitude. Could it be otherwise, since to reach my present office, I was not taken from the Church, the Cloister, the school of the Saviour, but from the palace of Cæsar, and I have begun by training falcons, patronizing actors, keeping packs of hounds, before being made a pastor of souls? Thus to-day I see myself quite forsaken by God, and nothing remains to me but to be turned out of the See which I am unworthy to occupy."[1]

[1] Herbert de Bosham, Vita S. Tomas, liv. III, 21, ap. Migne, t. CXC., col. 1143 *et. sq.*—Not believing in the *fall* of Thomas à

Becket was not content with accusing himself, and lamenting thus before his friends. He wrote to Alexander III. in similar terms, representing himself as the most guilty of men, humbly soliciting the Pope's absolution, and declaring that before receiving it, he did not feel he could celebrate the Holy Mysteries. He also begged the Holy Father to release him from the burden of the episcopate. The bearer of this letter took forty days to reach Sens where Alexander had then taken refuge, and forty more to return, during which time, Thomas, as if suspended, abstained from saying Mass, multiplied his fasts and macerations, and gave himself up to exercises of the most severe penance. The answer from the Holy Father was what one might have expected. He granted, as far as it was necessary, the absolution demanded, and ordered the Primate to say his Mass once more, and to resume the government of his diocese. Besides which, he approved of his resistance to the king's exorbitant claims, and formally condemned the Constitutions of Clarendon.

Whilst receiving this consolation and encouragement from the Sovereign Pontiff, Becket learnt from trustworthy friends that Henry II., still more

Becket, we cannot admit the anecdote of his cross-bearer, who, on leaving the castle of Clarendon, publicly reproached him for having failed in his duty, and drew from him the laments one has just read. This dramatic episode, from which Augustin Thierry has in his usual manner known how to get a striking effect, is only related by one of our old Chroniclers, Alan of Tewkesbury, who wrote some time after the event, and whose memory is not always trustworthy.

irritated by his attitude at Clarendon, cherished the blackest designs against him, which threatened his liberty, and even, it was believed, his life. The saintly Archbishop was prepared for the worst, and would not have recoiled from death itself. But in the actual state of things, in view of the obscurity which was weighing on so stormy and confused a conflict, and the deplorable weakness of a great part of the English episcopate, he considered that he ought not to give up the combat, but remain at the breach to defend and instruct his people, and to keep his enemies at a distance. At the same time, he felt that it was only on the Continent, when out of reach of the king's anger, and sheltered by the protection of the Holy See, that he could have the necessary liberty of action for pursuing the struggle efficaciously. He therefore went secretly for the coast of Kent to the port of Romney, where there was a manor belonging to the see of Canterbury. From thence, he twice attempted to cross to France. But the sea was very rough and the winds contrary; each time his bark after advancing a little towards the open sea was driven back to the shore by the violence of the tempest, perhaps also through the ill-will of the pilots, who, seeing the Archbishop leaving thus by night, with no escort, and as it were secretly, suspected that he was quitting England against the king's wishes, and feared to make themselves the accomplices of his flight.

On his return to Canterbury, he received numerous letters from France, in which the friends he had in that country, especially John of Salisbury and

the Pope himself, while recommending him in no way to yield on any question of principle, exhorted him for the sake of peace to make all the concessions compatible with his conscience, and to endeavour to be reconciled to the king. Before his two attempts at flight, he had already tried to see Henry; he had asked him for an audience, which had been refused. However, yielding to his friends' advice and the counsels of Pope Alexander, he once more went to Woodstock. This time he was received, but with the same cold and distant politeness which the king had shown him in the interview which had preceded the Council of Clarendon. Henry contented himself with vague and meaningless remarks; he made but a hasty and ironical allusion to the Romney incident: "My Lord Bishop," said he, in a half serious, half mocking tone, "you wanted to leave my kingdom; apparently you do not find it large enough for both of us." In reality his heart was full of implacable vengeance, and he hated this former favourite, in whom he now saw only his mortal enemy. At the very moment when he was thus jesting he was already preparing a plot against him, which he hoped would certainly bring about his ruin.

In fact, some weeks after this second meeting at Woodstock, Henry convoked a new Parliament at Northampton. It was to be opened on Tuesday,[1]

[1] May we be permitted to transcribe here, if only as curious and as indicating the spirit of the time, the following lines by Matthieu Paris:—"Many important events happened to Blessed Thomas on Tuesday. One does not know if this singular coin-

October 6th, 1164. What was the motive of this assembly? Before all else, the king wished that Becket should enter it as an accused person, and only leave it when condemned. But all along we find Henry's conduct towards Becket to be false and mean. In reality, it was solely because the latter had refused to sign the Sixteen Articles that he was going to appear before this fresh tribunal. They were careful not to say so, and a report was spread that he had to answer to a pretended miscarriage of justice, committed by him to the detriment of one of the king's officers. A certain John the Marshal, whom the chroniclers of the time represent as a noted man and a member of the Court of Exchequer, claimed a piece of land from the see of Canterbury, pretending he had a right to

cidence be a presage, or simply the result of chance. He was born on Tuesday, . . . and it was fitting that he who was to combat the devil should come into the world on Tuesday, the day of Mars. Mars, in fact, according to the poets, is called the god of war, and the life of Blessed Thomas was one long struggle against the enemy. . . . It was on Tuesday that the nobles of the kingdom assembled at Northampton, and drew up an accusation against him; it was on Tuesday that he was sent into exile; it was on Tuesday that Our Lord appeared to him at Pontigny, and said to him: 'Thomas, Thomas, my Church will be glorified in your blood.' It was on Tuesday that he returned from exile; it was on Tuesday that he gained the martyr's palm; besides, and this surpasses all human foresight, and can only happen by the will of God, it was again on Tuesday that the body of Venerable Thomas was gloriously transferred, fifty years after the epoch of his martyrdom, in the year of Our Lord 1220. And lastly, it was also on Tuesday that King Henry, who had persecuted him, was consigned to the earth" (*Grande Chronique* of Matthieu Paris, traduite par A. Huillard-Breholles, t. i. p. 475 *et sq.*).

hold it as an hereditary fief. His demand was considered unfounded, and the episcopal judges pronounced against him. He then appealed from this sentence to Henry II. himself, who, only too glad to find an opportunity of applying one of the articles of Clarendon and at the same time of re-opening hostilities against Thomas à Becket, summoned the latter to appear before the King's Court on September 14th, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The Archbishop was not there in person, because he was too ill, but he was represented by four knights, bearers of a letter from him, which excused his involuntary and enforced absence, and of another from the Sheriff of Kent, which plainly showed that John the Marshal's appeal was not admissible. Furious at seeing his prey escape him for the moment, the king would listen to nothing; he was on the point of imprisoning the four knights, and would not allow them to depart except on bail. Then he announced that he would again summons Thomas à Becket, but this time before the Parliament of the Barons of the realm and the high dignitaries of the English Church. Such was the motive or rather the pretext for the Council of Northampton: for several contemporary writers suspect Henry of being the real author of all this ridiculous quibble, invented in the sole design of bringing by force before his tribunal, him whose destruction he had already sworn.

The Archbishop arrived at Northampton on the appointed day. But the king was hunting, and lingered till nightfall in pursuit of wild fowl along

the rivulets and streams. The day following, Thomas was able to obtain an audience, but hardly had he begun to vindicate himself as regards John the Marshal, when Henry interrupted him brusquely: "John is not here," said he, "but in London, where he is working in my service with the collectors of the royal treasure: he will come to-morrow, and then one can attend to his suit." Thus it was not until Thursday, October 8th, that Parliament opened. The king put Marshal's cause first, but at the same time it was easy to see how little he cared about it. The examination of this affair, which he had appeared to have so much at heart, only lasted a few minutes, Henry allowing neither party to explain, and leaving the judges only just time to pronounce the sentence, which had evidently been prepared beforehand. This sentence declared Becket guilty of contumacy for not having responded to the first summons which had been served on him, and of having denied justice towards one of the king's men in refusing to put John the Marshal in possession of the land he claimed. Accordingly the Archbishop was pronounced to be at the Sovereign's mercy, which, in the juridical language of the time, meant that to the latter was adjudged all he liked to take of the goods of the condemned. For the moment, Henry contented himself with a fine of five hundred pounds in gold.

Since the barons and bishops had only been convoked to decide the dispute between the Primate and an insignificant officer of the Exchequer, one might have thought that the Parliament of Northampton was finished and would be dissolved; it

was now that it was just about to begin. The king's object had been to make his victim fall into his hands. Now that he held him he would not let him go before he had despoiled, dishonoured, and crushed him. Besides, he thought of nothing else but satisfying his hatred and resentment. The Archbishop's destruction was to him the chief thing on which, in his eyes, depended, one would have said, the safety of the State and the honour of the Crown, and which made him forget everything else even to the "Customs" of his grandfather, of which there was not once any question during the sitting of the Council.

Henry always gained his ends by devious ways. Marshal's suit was no sooner judged, than the king claimed from Becket certain sums which had passed through his hands when Chancellor, and which, said his persecutor, he ought to restore to the Exchequer. These sums, many of which were considerable, especially for that epoch, had been collected as the revenues of his benefices and personal property, or as the gratuitous gifts of the prince; the others were Crown revenues, which he had applied to the needs of the State. Now, of these latter, not one groat had been diverted from its lawful use; and as to the former, after having deducted what was indispensable for his own expenses and the maintenance of his household, Becket had devoted them to the relief of the poor, or to those works of restoration and embellishment that we have seen him execute with such magnificence in the palaces and royal manors at the beginning of his administration. Henry was quite aware of this, yet he did not hesitate to treat

this faithful and upright servant as if he had been capable of malversation. That which further added to the infamy of the king's conduct was, that on becoming Archbishop, Becket, as we have said, received from the young Prince Henry, acting in his father's name, the receipt and full and entire discharge of all claims relative to his administration as Chancellor. Henry of Winchester, who had exacted this declaration from the heir to the throne, and who was present at Northampton, undertook to remind the king of it. The latter, with notorious bad faith, answered that he did not know what was meant, and that he had never given any orders on the subject of the discharge of which they spoke. The Archbishop then said that he would not lower himself to quarrel about money, and that he would pay what was claimed. And as some pledge was demanded of him, many barons offered to be his sureties, and all the prelates rendered him the same service, except one, and this was Gilbert Foliot, although, be it remembered, it was owing to Becket that he was Bishop of London. In reality it would have been very difficult for the Archbishop to pay the enormous debt with which he was so unjustly charged, and which far exceeded his private fortune and the revenues of his archbishopric. But this mattered little to the king: it was quite evident that he did not seek to enrich himself from the spoils of his enemy. If he thus attacked his property, it was only the more surely to reach his person. He wished to push him to extremities, and oblige him to surrender at discretion. "Either I shall no longer be

King, or this man will no longer be Archbishop," he had said, thus betraying his secret thought. He was understood by his courtiers and some of the bishops, who were not ashamed to go to Becket and to try by their entreaties and even threats to decide him to resign his see. Among the most zealous, one noticed Gilbert Foliot and Roger de Pont l'Evêque, Becket's old and irreconcilable enemy. One voice only was raised against them, that of Henry of Winchester, whose noble and generous character we have already admired. "This abdication," he said, "will lead the Church to her ruin. For, if our Primate and father leaves us this example of a Bishop, who at the first sign of an angry prince abandons the souls confided to him, what can we expect in future but the reversal of all rules, the overthrow of everything at the wish of the great, and servitude for clergy and people!" This language responded too well to the sentiments of Becket for him to think of leaving his post. However, the king was anxious to bring things to a close, for his many and disloyal claims and the pourparlers and discussions they had awakened had filled nearly three sessions of the Parliament. It was Saturday evening: the most sinister rumours began to circulate afresh, and soon reached the Archbishop's household. From many quarters at once, by the voices of his friends and by those interested or hostile, the opinion reached him that should he again present himself before the king, without having made his submission, he would be risking his life.

The next day being Sunday, there was no session. Becket spent the day in prayer and in conferring

with some friends on the events which had taken place, and on the conduct he ought to pursue in future. During the night of Sunday to Monday he was seized with a violent attack of kidney disease, from which he had suffered for some time. Acute pain with fits of shivering prevented him from rising. At this news the king thought it was a ruse on the part of the Archbishop, who feared, he said, to face his judges, and hear the condemnation which he had only too well deserved. He therefore sent two of his gentlemen to assure themselves of the real state of Becket's health. "You see," said Thomas to them, "it is impossible for me to go to the Castle to-day, but I will do so to-morrow at all costs, even if I must be carried there in a litter."

On Tuesday, Oct. 13th, he was able, but not without trouble, to leave his bed, and to say his Mass very early. By the advice of an old and venerable monk of St Andrew's convent, in which he was now lodged, he said the votive Mass of St Stephen. The introit of this Mass was most appropriate, for in it one read these words of the Psalmist: "Princes also did sit and speak against me."[1]

After his Mass, during which he had prayed fervently to the first Martyr for the strength and courage which sustain and help one to conquer in the battles of the Lord, he mounted his horse, vested in rochet and stole, holding in his right hand his great primatial cross, and, in his left, the bridle of his steed. An immense crowd soon collected in the

[1] *Sederunt principes, et adversum me loquebantur*, Psalm cxix. v. 23.

streets, and accompanied him with acclamations to the king's palace. In his struggles against Henry II. Becket had always had the people's sympathy. At that time oppressed and despised by the princes and lords, they found help and protection only from the priests. Then, too, it was from them alone they could receive that food of the soul so necessary, as it has been well said, "to man's moral nature, to that need of thinking, knowing, hoping and believing, that invincible need which surmounts all obstacles and survives all misfortunes."[1] Thus each time a conflict arose between the two powers, the poor and humble, without birth and fortune, and these were many, who had no place in the feudal hierarchy, were inclined to take the part of the Church. One had already seen this in England in the preceding century, when St Anselm was at strife with William Rufus. One day, when the conflict was at its height, "a soldier left the crowd, went and knelt before the Archbishop, and said: 'My Lord and Father, we, thy children, beg thee by my voice not to let thy heart be troubled. Think of blessed Job on the dunghill, the conqueror of the Devil, who, in Paradise, triumphed over Adam.'" "On hearing this, we all rejoiced," cried one of the witnesses of the scene, an intimate friend of the prelate, "and we took courage, putting our confidence in these words of Scripture, 'The voice of the people is the voice of God.'"[2] Was it not this same voice which resounded in the ears of Thomas à

[1] Guizot, *Histoire de la Revolution d'Angleterre*, t. i., Preface.
[2] Rémusat, *Saint Anselm*, p. 203.

Becket as he was going on October 13th, 1164, from St Andrew's monastery to the royal castle of Northampton?

Alas! it was not long before he heard another, that of the barons sold to the king, and also that, it must be said, of those prelates of the court, always inclined to exaggerate the rights of Cæsar at the expense of those of God. Their emotion was great when they saw him enter with the episcopal insignia, his silver crozier still in his hand. They tried to snatch it from him, but he clasped it firmly: "I must carry it," he said; "it is my safeguard, and it shows under which prince I fight." It also showed that he intended to present himself before the Court, not as a culprit, but as a pastor and father. Thereupon they left him alone, and all the bishops and temporal peers went to rejoin the king, who, on his approach, had withdrawn to the upper storey of the castle. Becket thus remained alone with his clerics in a vast room, which led into the hall where the Parliament had assembled. He sat down on a bench, calm and silent, while the most lively agitation reigned in the one where the king was holding his council.

Henry, no longer containing himself, cursed at one moment the insolence of Becket who had come, said he, to insult him in his own palace, at another the ingratitude and cowardice of his favourites, who had not known how to avenge him on the traitor. Such was the violence of his speech that even those who had contributed to raise the storm were frightened at the consequences which might follow, and Roger de Pont l'Evêque was seen to leave the

council chamber and hastily cross that in which Thomas was sitting, while addressing his clerks, he exclaimed: "Leave this, that you may not be witnesses to any blood-shedding, nor accomplices in the ill-treatment which the Lord Archbishop will have to undergo."

Others had followed him, but stayed near Becket to try and persuade him to yield. Bartholomew, Bishop of Exeter, threw himself at his feet, conjuring him to have pity on himself and the Episcopal Order; for the king had threatened with death whoever should dare to defend him. "Flee then," answered the Primate, "thou canst not understand the things of God."

However, the king and his councillors were now agreed upon the sentence. It was only too visible that Henry thirsted for his enemy's blood. The bishops had reason to fear: "Sire," said they, "our devotion to your crown obliges us to declare that a sentence of death would be fatal to you and your realm." It was then decided that Becket should be thrown into prison, which he should not leave until he had repaid all the sums which it was pretended he owed to the royal exchequer. This was, in reality, but another name for perpetual imprisonment. It only remained to make known the sentence. Most of the nobles then descended into the hall on the ground floor, led by two barons of the highest rank, Robert of Leicester and Reynald of Cornwall. Robert was deputed as speaker, but scarcely had he pronounced the first words: "Oyez, Seigneur, the judgment rendered against you . . ."

the Archbishop, remaining seated, interrupted him: "Son and earl, listen rather to me. As the soul surpasses the body in dignity and worth, so ought you also to obey God rather than a temporal prince. Besides, is it for a son to judge his father? I refuse your judgment and that of the king; after God, the Pope is my sole judge: I place myself and my Church under his protection, and citing you before him, I now depart." Then rising, he slowly withdrew, making a passage for himself between the crowded ranks of the lords, who, quite discomfited, dared not oppose his retreat. Some among them murmured against him. While crossing one of the courts he stumbled against a heap of wood. The archiepiscopal cross trembled in his hands, and he himself almost fell backwards. The serving-men and soldiers hooted, and picked up straw and dirt to throw at him. One of them went so far as to call him traitor and perjurer. Under his Bishop's robe Becket still possessed a knightly soul, which suddenly awoke at the shock of this outrage: "If my sacred profession did not forbid me," he exclaimed, turning to his aggressor, "I would answer the insults of this coward by arms."

He at length reached the gates of the castle. As soon as he appeared on the threshold an immense and joyous clamour arose from the midst of the crowd, who were waiting for him outside, and who, having heard of the threats against him, began to fear they would never again see him alive. He was then surrounded by the same eager enthusiasm as in the morning, when these poor people accompanied him

on his leaving the convent of St Andrew. They conducted him back there, praising God for having preserved him to them, asking for his blessing, many of them shedding tears which they did not seek to hide. He had great trouble in guiding his horse and making it advance in the midst of that sea of humanity. "See," he said to one of his clerks, "see what a glorious procession is escorting us from the tribunal to the monastery! These are Christ's poor who take part in my misfortunes; we will have them to sup with us." And indeed the doors of St Andrew's were thrown open, and a great repast was served to them at the Archbishop's request. He himself sat down with the monks and some of his clerks. "This is indeed a sad day," said one of the latter.—"Yes," answered Thomas, "but the last day will be still sadder." And after some moments of silence, he added these words which have been compared to those of Our Lord after the last supper: "Remain in silence and peace; let no bitter word escape your lips. If any one speak ill of you, do not answer. Those who suffer thus have the better part, and the worst is for those who make use of such offensive words. What matters it to us the sayings of the wicked, when we know we do not deserve their attacks?" When he had finished speaking, they resumed the daily reading in the book commenced, which was the Tripartite[1] *History of the Church*. They had just come to the account of the persecution which took place under Pope Liberius.

[1] Thus called because it contains the three histories of Socrates, Sozomenes and Theodoretus, bound together in a single book.

In the text these words of the Gospel were quoted: "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another." At these words Becket's glance encountered that of Herbert de Bosham, the young clerk who was at the Archbishop's side on the day of his consecration. The same thought crossed their minds, and Herbert at once divined his master's plans. The repast finished, Thomas went into the church, and asked them to make him a couch in the choir behind the High Altar. This order did not surprise them, for the preceding week he had spent a whole night before the Blessed Sacrament, watching and praying with the monks. The latter offered to keep him company this time also. But he only wished to have near him Herbert, and two lay brothers of the Order of Canons Regular of Sempringham, one of English birth named Scailman, the other Robert de Cave a Frenchman, and lastly Roger de Bray, the most devoted of all his servants, and a very trustworthy man. When they were alone, he explained to them the plan he had conceived, and which for some hours had been ripening in his brain. Herbert was to go at full speed to Canterbury, where he was to collect all the money he could, and from thence he would reach, by the shortest and most direct route, the town of St Omer, there to await the Archbishop. As to the latter, he and his three friends were to go, by short stages and devious paths, that they might more easily baffle the enemy's pursuit, towards a lonely spot on the coast, whence, under a false name and in a borrowed habit, he would embark for France.

Providence permitted this plan to be executed without any hindrance. At the hour fixed for their departure a violent storm arose, which befriended them by rendering the night darker and the roads more deserted. It was only at the end of twenty days that Becket reached the sea coast. As he had foreseen, on the first news of his flight, the king had had it guarded with the greatest care, but the surveillance was by degree relaxed, and they were searching for him in another spot when he was ready to cross the Straits. He had only journeyed by night, hiding himself by day in uninhabited places, or with hosts whose devotion and discretion were above suspicion. One day, having retired to a hermitage hidden in the midst of a solitary island, he was sitting at a rustic table before a meagre herb soup, which was all his repast consisted of, when Robert de Cave, all at once remembering the former splendour of the Lord Chancellor and the Primate of England, could not master his emotion, and went outside that he might weep unrestrainedly. Becket's last shelter was the very poor presbytery of a little parish in the county of Kent near the port of Sandwich. He stayed there several days, keeping himself constantly shut up in his room; for he was in his own diocese, and might have been easily recognized. His chamber had a window opening on to the interior of the church, from which every morning he heard Mass, and several times gave his benediction to those of his diocesans who came to assist at the offices, little suspecting his presence.

At length, on Monday, Nov. 2nd, before daybreak,

St Thomas, dressed in the coarse grey woollen tunic worn by the lay brothers of Sempringham, and going by the name of "Brother Christian," went down to the river bank, and was the sixth to go on board a little boat in which the companions of his journey and two brave priests, who had offered to serve as pilot and oarsman, had already taken their places. The crossing was long and difficult, for the sea was rough. It was not until evening, a little before sunset, that the travellers landed on the shores of Boulonnais, about a league from Gravelines.

A new and gloomy period was now commencing in our hero's life. When leaving the sad Assemblies of Westminster, Clarendon and Northampton, these first three stages of his sorrowful way, he was making one step more on that fatal descent, so eloquently described by Bossuet at the commencement of his Panegyric on Saint Thomas of Canterbury. After having said "that the mysteries of Jesus Christ are a continual descent, and that He was always falling, first from heaven to earth, from his throne to a cradle, then by several stages to ignominy and torture, to the darkness of the tomb, and down to the depths of hell," he adds, "that which Our Head has once done in His Sacred Person, he now accomplishes in His members, and the martyr we are now honouring is an illustrious example. St Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, having in the interests of the Church engaged in a long and fatal conflict with Henry II., King of England, we have seen him fall by degrees from favour to disgrace, from disgrace to exile, from exile to a species of proscription, and lastly, to a violent death."

CHAPTER VI

EXILE—SENTIMENTS OF THE KING OF FRANCE AND OF THE POPE — ST THOMAS AT PONTIGNY AND AT SENS—ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION—INTERVIEW AT FRETEVAL—RETURN TO ENGLAND

1164—1170

AT Gravelines the Archbishop was hardly safe. He was in the territory of Matthew of Alsace, Count of Boulogne, his personal enemy, and the friend and cousin of Henry II. When he was Chancellor, Thomas had made the most strenuous opposition to the scandalous marriage of this prince with Marie of Blois, daughter of King Stephen and the Abbess of Romsay. The animosity which Matthew had nourished against Becket, and, on the other hand, the cordial relations he had always entertained with his cousin, the more readily disposed him to grant the request which at this very moment the latter was sending him through his ambassadors.

In fact, no sooner had Henry II. heard of Thomas à Becket's flight than he had hastily assembled his council. It was decided that an embassy should at once be sent to the King of France and to the Sovereign Pontiff. It was under the conduct of

the Earl of Arundel, and was composed of many of the chief barons of the kingdom and of the Bishops most hostile to the Primate, among others, those of London and York. Directly on their arrival on the Continent, they were to seek an interview with the lords of those countries through which one might suppose the fugitive would pass, and obtain from them an assurance that they would not allow him to live in peace in their domains, but that if he were discovered they would have him arrested, and deliver him into the hands of the king, his enemy. Now, these also landed near Gravelines on the same day, and almost at the same hour as Becket and his companions. Like him, they had left the shores of England in the morning; they had embarked at Dover, only five leagues distant from Sandwich. The sea was still less merciful to them than to the Archbishop; thinking at one moment that shipwreck was inevitable, Gilbert Foliot prepared to save himself by swimming, and quickly divested himself of his hood and cloak, which became the prey of the waves. However, the ambassadors landed at night-fall on the shores of Boulonnais, and it is believed that on the following day they visited Count Matthew.

Thus, whilst he was in the dominions of this noble, Becket incurred the greatest danger. The disguise and false name which he had adopted were but a feeble protection, and he soon acquired the proof of this. Scarcely had he landed, when he perceived a group of huntsmen; one of them carried a falcon on his wrist. Yielding mechanically to an impulse

born of youthful memories, Becket approached and began to consider the bird attentively and *en connoisseur*. Surprised and mystified, the hunter, in his turn, regarded with curiosity the supposed Brother Christian, and was heard to mutter, "If this monk is not the Archbishop of Canterbury, he is wonderfully like him." "Have you ever seen an archbishop thus equipped?" at once replied Brother Scailman, whose presence of mind this time saved the illustrious exile.

But it required no fresh imprudence on his part again to betray him: it was enough to note the distinction of his manners, his tall stature, and noble features, which were well known in the Western provinces of France, where he had often appeared in great pomp and splendour when Chancellor, or when, already a bishop, he had gone to the Council of Tours. In spite of his great desire to leave the domains of Matthew of Alsace as quickly as possible, Becket was obliged to spend the night at Gravelines. He stopped in the neighbourhood and knocked at the door of a cottage, where, on account of his religious habit, he and his companions were received with pious eagerness. The two good lay brothers and his servant, the better to deceive their hosts, affected to treat him as an inferior, and he was careful to take the lowest place at the table. But, in spite of all these precautions, it was not difficult to perceive from the elegance of his speech, the ease and dignity which marked his whole person and his every gesture, that the humble robe of Brother Christian concealed a man of superior education and position. Every-

thing about him, even the familiar ease with which, without his fellow guests seeming the least shocked, he took the best pieces from the table and gave them smiling to the children of his host, contributed to awaken the latter's suspicions. He could not help imparting them in a low voice to his wife, who quickly shared them. Wishing then to do honour to so distinguished a visitor, the woman opened the cupboard and brought out all the best it contained—apples, nuts, and cheese—and set them before the noble stranger, who would have preferred not to be the object of such special attentions. On his side the husband sat down at Becket's feet, and without further preamble said: "God has shown me a great favour in sending you to my cottage." "Really! For whom do you take me, then? Am I not, as you can see, a poor lay brother; do not they call me Brother Christian?" "That may be; but whatever you are called, to me you are a great personage; you are the Archbishop of Canterbury."

It was quite evident that the good peasant had no evil intentions. Becket did not try to undeceive him, but the next morning before daybreak, having heartily thanked the charitable owners of the poor dwelling which had sheltered the first night of his exile, he left as soon as he could, and took the road to St Omer, where he was to meet Herbert de Bosham.

At St Omer he would no longer be on the territory of Matthew of Boulogne, but on that of Philip Count of Flanders. This prince was not his enemy: the year before even, when receiving John of Salisbury, then banished from England, he had questioned

him at length on the disputes between Becket and Henry II.; and appearing to take the Archbishop's part, had promised in case of need to afford him help and protection.[1] But at the same time Philip was the brother of Matthew; besides, while Becket was on his way to St Omer, the ambassadors of the King of England arriving in this town before him, saw the Count of Flanders, and made every effort to gain him over to the side of their master. With what success we shall see.

Henry's messengers had only just left St Omer when Becket arrived there. In spite of the princely hospitality which he received in the celebrated Abbey of St Bertin, in spite of the entreaties of the abbot and his monks, justly proud of possessing such a guest, he did not find it wise to prolong his stay among them without some security from the Count of Flanders. He therefore sent to know what were the latter's sentiments towards him. His ambiguous answer appeared threatening, and the Archbishop understood that he ought without delay to seek a more secure retreat in the domains of the King of France. He therefore left almost directly for Soissons.

From St Omer he had sent Herbert de Bosham to Compiègne, where Louis le Jeune was then residing. Herbert's mission was to find out the sentiments of this prince, and to ask if he would receive Thomas in audience, and allow him to remain in his kingdom. At the very moment when the messenger from the Archbishop of Canterbury was entering the

[1] Salisb., *Ep.* 134, ed. Giles, t. I. p. 187.

palace of Compiègne, those of the King of England were leaving it. They had given Louis VII. a letter from their master in which it was said that Thomas, "ci-devant Archbishop of Canterbury," had fled from England "like a traitor, and with evil intentions," and that he deserved that the King of France should expel him from his dominions. Such language could not fail to arouse real indignation in a prince who made it a point of honour, both in word and deed, to show himself a respectful and devoted son of the Church. At the words, "ci-devant Archbishop," Louis protested. "Who, then, has deposed him?" said he to the English deputies. "Certainly I am King in France, as your master is in England, yet I do not consider I have the right to depose the humblest cleric in my kingdom." On the Earl of Arundel's daring to remind him that the late Chancellor had done a great deal of harm to France, both as diplomatist and chief of the English army, "He has only done his duty," interrupted Louis, "in serving his king well. Had he been my subject, he would have acted thus in my behalf. His conduct deserved another reward." And with these words he dismissed the ambassadors, much disconcerted at their failure.

Quite another reception awaited Herbert de Bosham. A member of the episcopal family of Thomas à Becket, presenting himself in his name and on his behalf, he could not but be welcome to Louis le Jeune. We have just seen in what esteem this prince held the persecuted Archbishop. Already, in the preceding year, he had openly declared him-

self in his favour, when John of Salisbury, exiled from England, sought a shelter in France for himself and a protection for his master. The king, who received him at Laon, had lavished upon him proofs of sympathy, and promised never to abandon the cause of Becket, whom he loved, he said, like a brother.[1] As soon as he was told of Herbert's arrival he desired that he should at once be admitted to his presence. He gave him the kiss of peace, then, with an amiable abandonment and the most gracious familiarity, related to him all that had just passed with the English ambassadors. He afterwards added that not only would he guarantee peace and security in his dominions to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but that he intended to defray all his expenses, and make it possible for him to keep up his rank with dignity, in whatever part of the kingdom he might choose to remain. He added lastly that "one of the brightest jewels in the crown of France was that exiles, and especially persecuted ecclesiastics, should find in his domains security and protection from their persecutors."

The king did not simply content himself with words and promises. Without waiting for the Archbishop's visit, he set forth in great haste to Soissons, and scarcely had he arrived, than fearing to be forestalled by Becket, he went himself to his abode to take him the assurance of his devotion and offers of service. He spent some days at Soissons, occupied in choosing the officers and gentlemen of his Court who should compose the Primate's new household,

[1] Salisb., *Ep.* 145, t. I. p. 230.

and were first of all to accompany him and escort him as far as Sens, where he was anxious to go and plead his cause in person before the Sovereign Pontiff.

He had already been preceded in this town by the English ambassadors. The latter were not more successful with the Pope than with the King of France. It was not, however, that by their flatteries and promises, especially by their presents, of which they were told to be liberal, that they had failed to make partisans even in the ranks of the Sacred College. But their cause was too bad, and they rendered it still worse by the way in which they defended it. The first of their orators, who was heard before the Cardinals assembled in consistory under the presidence of the Pope, was the Bishop of London, Gilbert Foliot. His discourse was nothing but a tissue of invectives against Thomas à Becket. He went as far as to say that the Archbishop had taken flight without any motive, thereby justifying the sacred oracle, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth."[1] "Gently," interrupted the Pope; "gently, I beg of you." "You ask me to spare him, Holy Father," the Bishop of London dared to reply. "Not him," responded the Holy Father, "but yourself, my brother." This cutting remark made Gilbert entirely lose his assurance; he stammered a few words, and was then silent. Hilary of Chichester succeeded him, and was not more successful. He thought fit to use threats, and made Alexander understand that if he did not yield to the King of England the latter would embrace the party of the Schism, and declare

[1] Prov. xxviii. 1.

himself for the Antipope. The painful and too visible impression produced on the Cardinals by these words could not escape Hilary; he grew confused, lost the thread of his ideas, forgot even his syntax, so much so that solecisms succeeded to barbarisms on his lips,[1] to the noisy hilarity of his audience, and to the confusion of the orator, who stopped short, and could not finish his harangue. Then the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Exeter asked to speak in their turn, in the hope of effacing the lamentable effect of the preceding discourses; but they only made matters worse by going beyond the clumsy violence of their two predecessors. It was necessary to come to some practical conclusion. The English demanded that Becket should be ordered to return to England, and that the Pope should send a Legate there, with full powers, to examine into and judge the matter on the spot, in concert with King Henry. "This would have been," as one has well said, "to send the Archbishop to prison to fight against his jailer."[2] It would also have meant that the Sovereign Pontiff abdicated an essential prerogative of the Holy See by giving up his right to convoke to his tribunal and to judge in the last resort, and without appeal, a cause which interested in the highest degree the honour and independence of the Church. The English met with an absolute refusal.

They therefore resolved to at once leave Sens and

[1] He twice said *oportuebat* instead of *oportebat*, which made one of his hearers exclaim: "*Male tandem venisti ad portum.*"—Alain de Tewkesbury, ap. Migne, tom. cit., col. 219.

[2] Fleury, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, liv. 71[e], no. 12.

France. They were not far from the town and were following the left bank of the Yonne, when they perceived on the other side of the river a numerous cavalcade coming in the opposite direction. These were the gentlemen and officers of the Court of the King of France who, to the number of nearly three hundred, were escorting Thomas à Becket on his way to the Pope. The English envoys, who could already foresee the reception which Alexander would accord the Archbishop, were thus also able to imagine that which he had received from Louis le Jeune.

On his side, Becket was soon made aware of the sentiments of the Holy Father towards him. Herbert of Bosham had already been some days at Sens, where he had gone directly from Compiègne. He had assisted at the Conclave which had ended so disastrously for the English, and was able to give the Archbishop an account of it. He himself had been received in private audience by Alexander, who had welcomed him saying: "Your master, though still living, is already a martyr." This news must have inspired the holy Primate with confidence on his arrival in the town which then gave shelter to the Pontifical Court, and this confidence was not destined to be deceived.

In a second council held in order to hear the Archbishop, Alexander gave him the place of honour at his right, and during the recital which, by his request, the noble exile made of his sufferings since his leaving Northampton, he appeared, said contemporaries, moved to tears. Then Becket having read the famous articles of Clarendon, of which

everyone was speaking and of which no one, or hardly any one, knew the exact tenor, the Sacred College with one voice declared them unacceptable, while the Sovereign Pontiff solemnly condemned them.

But Becket had not come to Sens only to excite the pity of the Pope and Cardinals for his own misfortunes, nor to provoke the solemn condemnation of the pretended *customs* of England. The Pontifical absolution on the day following the Council of Clarendon had not entirely succeeded in calming the remorse with which one moment's involuntary error or weakness had inspired him, nor had it rendered him the peace of his conscience. Above all, he still retained his scruples as to the subject of his promotion to the Episcopate, and continued to regard himself as an intruder on the throne of St Anselm and St Augustine, and as having entered the sheepfold, not by the door of divine election, but through the arbitrary and interested choice of the Sovereign. Throwing himself then at Alexander's feet, he implored him to accept his resignation as Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England, and giving back to him the pastoral ring, he begged him to bestow it on some one more worthy. We have said that many of the Cardinals, too sensible to the munificence of Henry's ambassadors had not lent deaf ears to their solicitations. Desirous then to signalise their zeal for the prince whose benefits they had accepted, they hastened to express the opinion that Becket in thus resigning his office, had himself opened the way which might most easily

lead to the re-establishment of peace and that one should not hesitate to enter on it. Alexander did not answer and wished to take time for reflection. At the end of three days, having much consulted and prayed, he declared that he preferred honour to interest, and would not forsake a man who, for the Holy See and the Church, had sacrificed his wealth and his repose and had even risked his life. He sent for Becket and gave him back his ring, saying that he again put him in possession of his Archbishopric, and giving him a new investiture which effaced and should make him forget anything which might have been defective or irregular in the first.

Thomas à Becket then had only to choose the place of his sojourn in France: for it was too evident that it would be long before he could return to his diocese. He had been told of the Cistercian Abbey of Pontigny, situated at a dozen leagues from Sens in a lonely valley, surrounded by a belt of woods. The regularity, piety, and hospitable spirit of the monks had been much extolled. Guichard, the abbot of the monastery, a religious of great virtue, who was about to become Bishop of Lyons, was just then at Sens. As soon as he was informed of Thomas à Becket's desire, he showed the most lively joy and said he and his monks would consider it a great honour to receive so illustrious a host. A few days later Becket was installed at Pontigny. He did not wish to be distinguished from the other monks, except by a greater fidelity to the observances of the cloister and by a poorer and more mortified life. He even desired to wear their dress,

and was clothed in the Cistercian habit which, at his request, Alexander had sent him, after having blessed it himself.

Distant from the world as was this retreat, Becket did not long find there peace or shelter from the designs of his implacable enemy. When he had learnt the twofold failure of his ambassadors with the King of France and the Sovereign Pontiff, Henry II. had one of his attacks of furious anger, which made him quite beside himself and ready to go to any length. He wished first of all to revenge himself on the Archbishop, and ordered the confiscation of his goods and the banishment of all his relations, as well as those servants and friends who had remained faithful to him. All, without distinction of rank, age, and sex, old men, women with child and little children, were brutally ejected from the kingdom, after having been despoiled of everything they possessed. This was not all; by a refinement of cruelty of which history, we believe, offers no other example, all those who had come to the age of reason were made to swear on the Holy Gospels that as soon as they reached France they would go to Pontigny, that they might be seen by Becket and "greet him in their misery and rags."[1] Many of them perished on the way of cold, privation, and disease, many were absolved by the Pope from the oath they had been compelled to take; but the greater number of them reached Pontigny. The Archbishop had to endure the spectacle of this long and melancholy procession

[1] Michelet, *Histoire de France*, chap. v.

of exiles, whose complaints almost seemed to reproach him with their misfortunes, and who for the most part were attached to him either by the bonds of near relationship or of close friendship. What added still more to his grief was, that he was powerless to help them, and he had no other resource than to recommend them to the charity of his protectors in France and Italy, which, in this circumstance, as during the whole course of his exile, did not disappoint him.

But these repeated and cruel attacks on the holy Archbishop did not content Henry II. He sought some occasion for attacking the Pope also. It was not long before one presented itself. Towards the end of the month of May 1165, during the Feast of Whitsuntide, a council was held at Würzburg under the auspices of Frederick Barbarossa, who had convoked it. It was a question of recognising a new Antipope. Octavian had died in April of the preceding year. One of the Cardinals who had elected him and had remained faithful, Guy de Crême, had the doubtful honour of being chosen to succeed him, and took the name of Pascal III. Invited to have himself represented at this schismatic assembly, the King of England sent there John of Oxford, his tool, the intruded Dean of the Cathedral of Salisbury, and one of the most implacable enemies of Thomas à Becket. In his master's name, John promised obedience to Pascal, letting him also hope, on the part of the king, for the adhesion of more than fifty bishops. Henry Plantagenet had inevitably come to this. There is a secret and insurmountable logic

in things which he was forced to obey, in spite of the apparent and more or less calculated incoherence of his conduct. From the day when he broke with Thomas à Becket he took the first step, unawares, and perhaps in spite of himself, towards a rupture with the Pope. As Frederic Ozanam[1] has well said, "in Henry's person the spirit of tyranny had gradually risen to its height. He had first of all intended to revenge himself on an obscure man, a simple Canon. The latter had taken refuge under the protection of a law. Henry had demanded the abrogation of this law. They had answered him by showing that the whole of the ecclesiastical legislation of England depended upon it. The Archbishop of Canterbury had undertaken the defence of the institutions of his Church. Henry had dealt him blow after blow. He will soon perceive that the Archbishop of Canterbury has the Universal Church behind him; then he will attack the Church herself, and try to overturn the whole edifice because one humble stone of it has wounded his royal foot."

It is true that for the moment the rupture remained in a merely tentative state; it took four centuries more before it was consummated. It is also true that the King denied that he had ever thought of separating either himself or his kingdom from the communion of Alexander, and that John of Oxford protested that his proceedings at Würzburg were not in the least of a schismatic nature. But we already know how little reliance there was to be placed on the word of Henry II.; if we still

[1] *Deux Chanceliers d'Angleterre*, p. 154 *et seq.*

cherished any illusions in this respect we have only to read these lines, which he addressed to the Emperor a few weeks before the Council: "I have long sought for an opportunity of separating myself from Pope Alexander and his perfidious Cardinals, who are upholding against me the traitor Thomas, the former Archbishop of Canterbury." As to John of Oxford, he surpassed, if that were possible, his royal master by the effrontery of his treachery and the cynicism of his lies. At the not over scrupulous court of Henry Plantagenet he seems to have had the speciality of perjury. One often heard him maintain, sometimes on the same day, two entirely opposite opinions, and support them with the most solemn oaths, so much so that he was ironically surnamed "John the Swearer." The truth is that it was not Henry's fault, nor that of his accomplices, if, already in 1165, England had not rushed into schism, to the borders of which he had deliberately brought her. If he drew back, it was because he was afraid he would not be followed by the English clergy and episcopate; at the last moment he perceived that he had counted too much on their docility. He ought, however, to have known them better; for on the very eve of the assembly at Würzburg they had clearly enough shown their true sentiments. The Archbishop of Cologne, one of the principal abettors of the Schism, had come to London to negotiate, in Barbarossa's name, the marriage of Henry's daughter with the Duke of Saxony. The English bishops dared not forbid the Archbishop of Cologne and the priests in his suite to enter their

churches; but they took care to demolish the altars, where the schismatic priests had said mass, directly after their departure. Again, if Henry held back, it was, we do not hesitate to affirm, because he feared Thomas à Becket and the thunderbolts which he held in his hand. As Herbert de Bosham, a contemporary, well able to see and hear, says, "one understood when considering the saintly and illustrious exile, how little the treasures and power of this world were worth, in comparison with a man who had right and courage on his side, even if he did not possess a single crown." Becket's authority and prestige had never been greater; and one may add, he had never shown such zeal and boldness in defence of the cause which he personified.

We are tempted to believe that at this epoch of his life his character underwent some change. Of the two features which we have already noticed in it, gentleness and firmness, it appears that the second gradually gained the ascendency, so that at times it seemed almost to efface the first. Circumstances too were partly the cause of this. Besides the fact that the enemy grew still bolder and now knew no limits to his attacks against the Church, the care of defending her devolved more and more on Becket, and in these latter times his responsibility had singularly increased. Alexander II. had just left Sens and gone back to Italy. For nearly a year the Romans had ardently desired his return, which the death of Octavian seemed to render possible. The repeated and bloody defeats which the League of the Lombard cities inflicted about the

same time, on the Emperor Barbarossa, a deadly plague which decimated his army in Rome and its neighbourhood, also aided the cause of Alexander and ended in re-opening to him the approach to the Eternal City. He entered it in triumph, in the summer of 1165, a short time after the Council of Würzburg. From that time Thomas à Becket remained alone in France, in conflict with his formidable adversary and all his partisans. Bearing, as it were, the whole weight of the interests of the Church, he felt the need of vigorously using the arms put into his hands with the title of Legate of the Holy See, with which on his departure Alexander had invested him.

In the course of the year which followed the Council of Würzburg, Thomas à Becket proceeded to Vèzelay for the Feast of St. Magdalen. This feast was to be celebrated with special solemnity. Since one year, the Abbey of Vèzelay prided itself on possessing the body of the great penitent, the sister of St Lazarus, and a pilgrimage to the precious relics, soon popular not only in France but abroad, had at once come into existence, which attracted every day a numerous concourse of the Faithful from all countries. But on June 22nd, 1166, the affluence was greater than ever. Becket celebrated the Pontifical Mass in the superb Cathedral, too narrow to contain the enormous crowd. After the Gospel the Archbishop vested in all the insignia of his office, ascended the steps of the rood-loft, from which height he addressed the congregation. He commenced by a rapid and im-

passioned account of his contest with Henry II. Then attacking the most compromised of the King's accomplices he excommunicated John of Oxford, by name for his intrusion into the office of Dean of Salisbury, and for his relations and connivance with the German Schismatics, and after him several English bishops and lords guilty of spoliation or usurpation committed at the expense of the Church. Becket had at first thought of excommunicating Henry. But he had just learnt that the King was dangerously ill. Out of some lingering pity, perhaps also some hope, he contented himself with warnings and threats, declaring that if he did not soon amend his ways, he also would be struck by the bolt which had fallen at his side. But the more the Primate spared the person of the Prince, the more right he considered he had to reprove his actions, and in particular the fatal Constitutions of Clarendon which he stated were solemnly condemned by the Holy See, adding that in future one could not have recourse to them without immediately falling under the censures of the Church.

This discourse created the profoundest emotion in the crowded ranks of all these pilgrims of different nationalities, among whom were many subjects of the King of England. The latter was then at Chinon, and was soon informed of what had just passed at Vèzelay. He at once convoked a parliament of the Bishops and Barons of his dominions in the British Isles and on the Continent. His anger needed to express itself in invectives and

insults. Not being able for the moment to hurl them in the face of his enemy who was absent, he attacked his hearers and apostrophised them in these terms:—"Cowards and felons! Will you do nothing then to deliver me from this man, my one enemy!" This speech deserves to be noticed. It is not the first time the King has pronounced it, and he will repeat it later. In fact two years earlier, on the last day of the Council at Northampton, we have not forgotten that Henry addressed a similar appeal to his barons, and four years after the Parliament at Chinon, he will repeat it again almost literally, and we know under what circumstances and on the eve of what catastrophe, one which will be its terrible but only natural echo. Let us add that on several occasions since the assembly of Westminster, threats of death coming from the King or his confederates had repeatedly reached the ears of the Archbishop. We must remember all these facts, when it is a question of assigning to each one his share of guilt in the murder at Canterbury.

But Henry wished to revenge himself immediately on the audacious Pontiff who had not feared to unsheathe the spiritual sword against some of his most devoted servants, and even to threaten him with it. The Abbey of Pontigny belonged to the same Order as Citeaux. Now the Cistercians possessed many flourishing houses in the King of England's domains. The latter declared that they should all be closed and confiscated, and their Religious expelled from his possessions on the Continent or in Great Britain,

if Thomas à Becket continued to receive hospitality at Pontigny. A General Chapter was being held precisely at the capital of the Order when the notification of the royal decision arrived there. The Abbot of Pontigny was present: he wished to resist the tyrannical commands of Henry. But Becket could not consent to remain at Pontigny at the risk of causing the ruin of a Religious Community to whom he was under such deep obligations. "The Lord," he said, "knows how to feed the birds of the air and to clothe the lilies of the fields: His Providence will never forsake me, and I trust in that." Louis le Jeune, informed of his distress, sent to tell him that all the castles and palaces of the Crown were placed at his disposal, that he had only to choose, and that everywhere he would be received with all the respect and honour due to his office, as also to his virtues and misfortunes. Becket answered that he would only accept a cell in another convent, and he expressed his desire of retiring to the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Colombe at Sens. On the King's recommendation, he was received there with open arms, and it is here that he spent the last four years of his exile. As he was on his way there, accompanied by the Abbot of Pontigny, who had insisted on conducting him to his new home, the latter noticed that he was very sad, and walked along as if absorbed in thought. Approaching him, he asked the reason of his silence and sadness. After some hesitation, and not without having exacted a promise of secrecy, Becket related what follows:—"Last night I had a dream in which it

was revealed to me that I shall die a violent death. I thought I was in a church, but do not know which one. I was pleading before the Pope and Cardinals against the King of England. The latter were in favour of my adversary; the Pope was on my side. All at once four knights appeared, who, seizing hold of me, dragged me away far from the tribunal of the Sovereign Pontiff to a spot remote from the church, that they might cleave my skull just where I am tonsured, and where the holy oil has flowed. I know that this dream is prophetic, and it is this which troubles and afflicts me; not that my end, thus foretold, alarms me; but I cannot help feeling a lively grief at the thought of all those who have followed me till now, and who have suffered so much in my cause, for I know also that when the shepherd has been struck the little flock will be scattered."

At Saint Colombe, in Sens, Becket had, as he desired, only a monk's cell. Even this he wished to share with one of the companions of his exile, Canon Robert, one of his former masters at Merton, now his chaplain, and also the confidant, the witness, and, one may add, the minister of his terrible penances. Three or four times each night he was awakened by Becket, who obliged him to give him the discipline on his bare shoulders. The good chaplain would often weep at the sight of these poor bleeding members, and, unable to continue, would throw the rod far away from him, exclaiming "Woe is me! why was I born?"

If the saintly Archbishop spent his nights in thus torturing himself, his days were divided between

prayer and study. As when at Canterbury the Scriptures and the Fathers were his favourite reading, he also seems to have used his pen while here, for under his name we have four proses in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Supposing them to be really his work—and nothing either in their composition, which ranks them among the average productions of the same kind and date, or in the sentiments which they breathe, and which well respond to his faith and piety, hinders us in believing in their authenticity —it is certain that he composed them during his stay at Saint Colombe. Then he had some leisure, and, on the other hand, his piety became more ardent in proportion to his trials, and as he clearly foresaw the end which awaited him. It is also at this epoch that he wrote the greater part of the letters that are preserved, and which are as precious a monument for the history of his time as for that of his life.

If the twelfth century had left us no other sources of information about St Thomas à Becket, his character and genius, this correspondence would alone suffice to show us that he was a Canonist versed, more than any one of his time, in the knowledge of ecclesiastical laws; a Doctor familiar with all the *chefs d'œuvre* of Christian antiquity; a Humanist even who was pleased to sow here and there, with perhaps somewhat too lavish a hand, reminiscences from his readings of the Latin poets; but above all we see the vigilant, zealous, intrepid Pontiff, who never wavers when principles are at stake; who, without wanting in prudence and charity, carries into his struggles for the Church's rights a

valour and energy all the greater when the perils are more menacing and the adversaries more formidable.

There are even, we must own, certain letters, which either addressed to the Sovereign Pontiff or speaking of him, astonish us at first sight by the vivacity of their tone, the boldness of their criticism, and the reproaches they contain. But when reading them, one must go back to the epoch when they were written and in which, with respect to the most august and venerated of the powers of this world, one used a language which would not be correct to-day. Remember Saint Bernard, for instance: it was not long before this that he had dedicated his book *De la Considération* to Pope Eugene III. More recently, John of Salisbury had not shown less independence in his letters to Adrian IV., the immediate predecessor of Alexander. There was nothing then peculiar or shocking in the eyes of Thomas à Becket's contemporaries in his most vehement apostrophes addressed to the latter Pontiff or to the high dignitaries of his Court. On the other hand, we are not astonished that he had found matter for reproof in the opinions, decisions, and acts of Alexander, and that he was often in disagreement with him. Since the Sovereign Pontiff had left France, he could only know of the affairs of this country through oral reports. Now the emissaries of Henry II. showed themselves singularly eager and clever in representing them to the Pope under a distorted aspect, and drew from him measures either unfavourable to Becket or too well calculated to surprise and alarm him. On the other hand, those who knew so well

how to deceive the Pope also deceived the Archbishop, when they returned from Rome, by exaggerating the success they had gained, and even going so far as to falsify the documents they had obtained from the office of the Pontifical Chancellor, and to travesty the simple forms of courtesy or diplomatic prudence into formal condemnations of the Primate's conduct and claims. Let us also add that the mind and character of Alexander III. and that of Thomas à Becket were of very different stamp. The Pope was a diplomatist, wonderfully versed in that art of expedients and temporising, which Becket had himself formerly practised at the time when he was Chancellor of England and lived at the Court, but which, since then, he seemed to have entirely given up, so that he now passed for a self-willed and positive man. In fact one often sees him, in his letters, blaming the Roman Curia for not being prompt and vigorous enough in action, for employing too cautious and dilatory methods, for sacrificing the Lord's cause to His worst enemies,[1] and finally he complains of being forsaken by those for whom he had suffered so many evils.

He was, in fact, forsaken for a short time by another of his protectors. In the beginning of the year 1169, Louis le Jeune sought to conclude with the King of England one of those numerous treaties of peace which so frequently reconciled them, but which the conflicting interests of the two crowns,

[1] S. Thomas Cantuar, *Epist.* xxxi. ap. Migne, t. cxc. col. 492 *et seq.* : Nescio quo pacto pars Domini semper mactatur in Curia, ut Barabbas evadat, et Christus occidatur.

and above all Henry's bad faith, always rendered so precarious and unstable. The two princes were to meet at Montmirail, in le Perche, between Chartres and Le Mans, in order to arrange the terms of their agreement. The Pope ardently wished that another reconciliation should take place at the same time, that of the King of England and the exiled Archbishop. The proposed interview between the two monarchs was thought to be a favourable opportunity. Louis le Jeune consented without any difficulty to intervene in Thomas à Becket's favour. It was more difficult to persuade the latter to go to Montmirail. So many similar attempts had already failed. So often had colloquies and conferences been held, correspondence and messages exchanged, negotiations been carried on by proxy between the two belligerents, and all had miscarried on account of Henry's bad faith. However, Becket ended by yielding to the persuasions of the Sovereign Pontiff and set out for le Perche. For three days the two princes conferred together: on the third Becket was called. On approaching the King of England, he bent his knee and in the humblest attitude and most submissive tones solicited the favour of making his peace with the King: "Sire," said he, "I implore your mercy for me and for your Church at Canterbury, so troubled because of my sins. I leave the dispute which has arisen between us to your judgment and discretion, *sauf l'honneur de Dieu*." At these last words Henry flew into a violent passion, loaded the Archbishop with insults and reproaches, calling him proud, disloyal, ungrateful, even going

so far as to say that, if when Chancellor he had been so fond of magnificence and display, it was in order to supplant him and take away his crown. Becket allowed this torrent of invective to pass unanswered, but the bystanders were revolted by it to such a degree that some of them could not help muttering: "We knew he was a liar; we did not think he could be so brutal." Henry took care not to acknowledge that he was in the wrong; but he excelled in getting out of a difficulty. Becket, who knew him so well, called him afterwards, in one of his letters,[1] a Proteus, clever in assuming every mask and every attitude and escaping just when you thought you were sure of him. Like Proteus in the fable, when he seemed to recoil, he was always advancing in the tortuous manner of the serpent who—

". . . Glisse sur lui-même et d'un pli fait un pas."[2]

As Becket tried calmly and with dignity to refute Henry's injurious accusations, the latter interrupted him, but without violence, and addressing himself directly to Louis le Jeune: "Sire," said he, "is it not true that if I passed over the restriction he has just pronounced, he would pretend that all that pleases me and does not please him is contrary to the honour of God; and by means of these two words alone, he would deprive me of all my rights. I wish, however, to make him a concession, and to show how far I am from wishing in any way to lessen the honour of God. There have certainly been less powerful kings than myself in England, and more holy archbishops in the See of Canterbury

[1] S. Thomæ, *Epist.* xl. col. 615. [2] Florian, Bk. iv. fable 11th.

than he; let him simply act towards me as the most saintly of his predecessors has acted towards the least of mine, and I shall be satisfied." These words, pronounced in a conciliatory tone, deceived everyone, the King of France among the first, who, turning to Becket, said hastily: "Well, my Lord Archbishop, do you pretend to be more holy than the saints? What more do you expect, and how can the King humble himself farther? If you really wish for peace, there it is. It is in your own hands, it only depends on you to conclude it at once." The whole assembly, French and Normans, clerks and knights, was of the same opinion as Louis. The Archbishop alone had been able to read in Henry's profoundly false soul, and to recognise that in his evidently ironical proposition was hidden at least as much mental reserve as in the clause *sauf l'honneur de Dieu*. He therefore refused to make any change. All present then began with one voice to accuse him of blindness and obstinacy. And all withdrew, leaving him alone. The two Kings remounted their horses, and departed without saluting him or waiting for his greetings.

On leaving, in his turn, the plain where the conference of the two Sovereigns had been held, Thomas à Becket returned for the night to the Château of Montmirail, where he and his suite had been lodged, and where Louis le Jeune and his court were also staying. On all the preceding days, the King of France had come in the evening to visit the Archbishop and spend some moments conversing with him. This evening he did not appear, and the next

day Becket was obliged to set out for Saint Colombe without having been able either to see or take farewell of him. On the way he had the grief of hearing himself loudly criticised by his clerks and intimates, all of whom except the faithful Herbert seemed to have taken the part of Henry II. His only consolation during the journey was to see the peasants, who formed themselves into groups along his passage, pointing him out with curiosity, saying: "Here is this Archbishop, who has not his like in courage and prudence, and who would not deny the honour of God to please the kings of the earth."

On his return to Sens, he expected every day to receive an order from Louis le Jeune to leave France, and he was wondering sadly where he would go to seek a shelter and beg his bread, when they came to tell him that the King had arrived in the town and desired to see him. Obeying the summons, Becket at once went to the Prince, and he and his clerics found him seated; he did not rise to receive them, which they considered an ill omen. They remained for some time in silence, the King with bowed head, looking sad and depressed, which made them think that he regretted sending them away. At length he rose dissolved in tears, threw himself at the Archbishop's feet, to the great astonishment of those present, and said in a voice broken by sobs: "Pardon me, my Father, pardon me. You are the only one among us who has seen clearly; we were blind and foolish when we advised you to sacrifice the honour of God to a man's caprice. I repent, my Father, and beg you to give me absolution. I put myself and

my kingdom at your disposal, wishing only to act by your advice, and promising you that, as long as God grants me life, I will never forsake either you or yours."

After this reception from the King of France, it was not possible to doubt that he was well-disposed to the Archbishop, and the latter no longer feared to find himself without shelter and protection in his exile. But, on the other hand, after the unfortunate result of the meeting at Montmirail, it was also impossible to suppose that Henry II. sincerely desired to be reconciled to Becket, and that he would ever willingly consent to give satisfaction to the Church and to the Holy See. Still the Pope did not refuse to renew negotiations with him or his agents, and the whole of the year 1169 and the first six months of the next were spent in fresh negotiations and new embassies, which had no other effect than to show more clearly the ill-will and bad faith of the English King and to increase the obstacles in the way of a serious and lasting agreement, for Henry profited by the prolongation of this state of things to multiply his usurpations and his abuses of power, spoiling the goods of the Church; distributing the domains of bishoprics and abbeys to his favourites; filling with his creatures, however unworthy, the episcopal sees then vacant in great numbers; at length going so far as to cause his son, the young Prince Henry, to be crowned by Roger de Pont l'Evêque, the excommunicated Archbishop of York, Becket's mortal enemy, and this in spite of the formal prohibition of Alexander III., and in contempt of the sole and

immemorial right possessed for centuries by the Primates of Canterbury, that of crowning the Kings of England.

The patience of the Sovereign Pontiff was now at an end. Convinced that he could obtain nothing except by force, he at length decided upon severe measures. Apostolic letters were indited and ready to be published, intimating that if within a certain delay the King of England had not repaired all his wrongs, he would be excommunicated and his kingdom laid under an Interdict. Henry was alarmed; he let it be known that he was resolved to accept all the conditions which the Pope should dictate and at all costs to make his peace with Thomas à Becket. There was just then a question of a fresh interview between the Kings of France and England, who were again desirous of being reconciled, for, since the Pacification of Montmirail, they were more than ever at variance. The meeting was to take place on July 20 at Fréteval, on the borders of Touraine and in the district of Chartres. Becket yielded to his friends' persuasion and went there accompanied by Guillaume de Champagne, Archbishop of Sens, and his brother Theobald, Earl of Blois. The Conferences of the two Sovereigns was held at some distance from the castle of Fréteval, in a valley which, as they afterwards learnt, was known to the people of the country as the Valley of Traitors. It was there that Becket was received by Henry II. on July 22nd, the Feast of St Magdalen, just four years, to the very day, after the memorable ceremony of Vézelay.

When the King of England perceived the Archbishop, he galloped to meet him, saluted him the first, held out his hand amicably, then took him apart that he might converse with him freely without being heard by the crowd of courtiers, who were observing them at a distance, noting all their gestures and attitudes in order to arrive at some conclusion as to the matter and sense of the conversation, which was prolonged with much animation and cordiality until the evening. At one moment Becket was seen to dismount abruptly and to kneel before the Prince, who in his turn dismounted, and in the most respectful position held the Primate's stirrup to help him to his saddle. This scene, which left no doubt as to the good understanding between the two, provoked murmurs of approbation and even applause among the spectators. Some of them, however, who were the chief fomentors of this long and fatal dissension, could not hide their annoyance. Henry noticed it, and advancing, said to them: "I find the Archbishop perfectly well-disposed towards me; if then, on my side, I did not treat him well, I should be one of the worst of men and should prove that all the evil which is said against me was true. Therefore the best and most honest part to take is to study to surpass him in proofs of affection and good will."

One would now suppose that peace was definitively made and that the best feeling would henceforth reign between the two adversaries. Far from it! This scene was simply a comedy: the interview at Fréteval was nothing but a fresh mystification,

another ambush. Some weeks later Becket wrote to Pope Alexander: "From the moment that the trumpet of Apostolic threats had resounded in the ears of the King of England, and he seriously feared the Church's severity for himself and his kingdom, he was willing to make peace with us, and promised to execute all your orders." This was true, and it was indeed fear which, as we have said, had led Henry II. to the Traitors' field at Fréteval. But there was another motive which he had obeyed. Shortly before the scene we have just witnessed, Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, tells us the King had received, from an unknown hand, a note thus expressed: "Why oblige the Archbishop to remain out of the kingdom? You would have a far better hold on him if he were in it."[1] The threats of the Holy See and the fear of its thunderbolts compelled Henry to think seriously of re-opening the gates of England and of his diocese to the Archbishop. The anonymous advice which was given so opportunely to the King, made him clearly understand the profit which he could draw from his apparent capitulation and decided him upon it. Thus, hardly was the reconciliation concluded, than he had no peace till Becket had re-crossed the Channel. He seized every opportunity to hasten his departure with an eagerness and insistance which, even to the most optimist and least defiant minds, appeared suspicious. It was evident that he wished once more to have him at his mercy, as in the days of the Parliament of Northampton,

[1] Ut quid tenetur exclusus? melius tenebitur inclusus quam exclusus, ap. Migne, t. cxc. col. 165.

and to take his revenge for the Primate's unexpected flight, which had then frustrated all his plans.

Besides he did not long restrain himself and soon let it be seen that he would not keep any of the engagements he had made at Fréteval. He had promised to restore to Becket, all the possessions and domains of his See, which since the beginning of his exile had been alienated or confiscated. As weeks elapsed without any order being given, or any measures taken with a view to these restitutions, the Archbishop sent John of Salisbury and Herbert of Bosham to the King. They found him in Normandy, suffering from tertian ague, and were obliged to wait for his convalescence. At length he received them, but only answered them evasively, then, as John of Salisbury persisted: "John, said he, I will not give you back a single castle till you have changed your conduct towards me." During the six years which Becket had spent in France with no other resources than the favours of Louis le Jeune or the liberality of his hosts of Pontigny and Sens, he had made many debts. Henry had promised to pay them, and had fixed a day, when he should meet the Archbishop at Rouen and give into his own hands, the necessary sum to satisfy all his creditors. When he went to Rouen, Becket found neither the King nor the promised money, but only a letter from Henry expressing his regret for having been obliged to miss the appointment, and announcing that he was sending, of course empty-handed, John of Oxford, in his stead. The latter was a sworn enemy of the Primate and one of the chief instigators of

the persecutions directed against him. Another promise that the monarch had made, implicitly at least to Becket, and to which the latter attached special importance, was that of giving him at length the kiss of peace. This was, according to the custom of the time, the seal of every sincere reconciliation, as well as that which rendered any contract inviolable and sacred. It had to be exchanged at the foot of the Altar during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. When Becket had spoken to the king about it at Fréteval, the latter had answered that he was only too willing to grant him this, but that in a moment of exasperation against the Archbishop he had made a vow, some time before, never to give him the kiss of peace, and that his conscience would not now permit him to perjure himself. Although it was impossible to take such a refusal as serious, Becket submitted the case to the Sovereign Pontiff, who absolved Henry from his oath. Becket then went to see the king at Chaumont between Blois and Amboise; in the morning he repaired to the chapel at the same time as Henry; but at the moment when the celebrant was about to go on the altar, the prince gave orders for a Requiem Mass to be said, in which, according to liturgical rules, the kiss of peace was omitted. After the Mass, the Archbishop went to take leave of the king, and, looking fixedly at him, said to him significantly: "Sire, I believe I shall never see you again in this world."—"Do you take me for a traitor then?" answered Henry, impatiently, who understood only too well the sense of these words. The Archbishop bowed and departed.

The friends and protectors of Becket begged him earnestly not to put faith in Henry's deceitful words, and not to return to England until he had received less equivocal proofs that he was reinstated in the king's favour. "Believe me, my Lord Archbishop," said Louis le Jeune to him, "you must not give yourself up to your sovereign's pleasure until you have received the kiss of peace from him." At the same time the most alarming news arrived from Great Britain. John of Salisbury had preceded his master; when passing through the Archbishop's domains, he had seen nothing but houses pillaged and almost in ruins, barns emptied and land devastated. All the revenues had been collected in the king's name, until the Christmas term, although the conclusion of the peace dated from the feast of St Magdalen. On every side he heard it said that this peace was but a snare, and that one must not expect the Primate's return. The king's agents redoubled their audacity and arrogance. One of them went so far as to say that if Becket showed himself in England, they would not even leave him time to eat a whole loaf. This was not all, and the most sinister rumours began to circulate. On the sea-coast, and especially at Dover, officers and soldiers had been seen pass and repass, armed to the teeth, who were watching, it was said, for the Archbishop to land, so that they might seize and kill him.

Warnings from heaven were added to these prognostics and counsels of purely human origin, not, it is true, to dissuade him from returning to the midst of his flock, but rather to show him the

martyr's crown, and to prepare him for receiving it. There was at that time in England, in the forest of Finchal, near Durham, an old hermit, Godric by name, whose prophecies and miracles were well known. Becket had several times consulted him, and had always found he had done well in obeying his counsels, and in putting faith in his predictions. In the beginning of 1170, he sent a messenger to Finchal, to obtain some new light on the conduct he should pursue, and the issue of the crisis which had lasted more than six years.

The hermit answered Becket's messenger in these terms: "Tell the Archbishop not to lose courage if he still has much to suffer: the longer the trial, the more glorious will be the crown. Before six months have passed (it was then the month of March) peace will be concluded in words between him and the king; but Godric will no longer be of this world (he died in the second fortnight in May). Nine months from hence the Archbishop's honours will be restored to him; he will return to his church in the county of Kent, and it is there that an event will take place which will put an end to all his troubles, and which must turn to his salvation and glory as well as to the edification of all. Remember these last words and repeat them faithfully; for by the grace of the Holy Spirit, he will no sooner have heard them than he will understand their hidden sense."

Their sense, Becket certainly understood, especially in the light of the events which followed the pretended peace of Fréteval. He realized that

the moment had come, in which he could not better serve the cause for whose triumph he so ardently longed, than by dying for it. He understood, too, that, according to this "law," so admirably explained by Bossuet, "the Church cannot enjoy any advantage which does not cost her her children's lives, and that to affirm her rights blood must be shed."[1] Thus to those who urged him to delay his departure, and not to rashly risk his life, he answered without hesitation: "If I knew for certain I should be dismembered and torn in pieces when landing on English shores it would not stop me. The seventh year of my exile has now begun. It has been too long an absence both for the pastor and the flock." And he added: "If I do not re-enter Canterbury alive, at least, they shall take me back dead."

In the latter part of November, he arrived at the port of Wissant, near Calais. A little squadron equipped by the forethought of the King of France there awaited the holy Archibishop, who, on the 1st of December, before daybreak, went on board the vessel which was to take him back to his own country. The wind was favourable, and the ships soon put out to sea. When they could perceive the shores of Great Britain, the Primate's clerks hurried on deck to salute them from afar. "You are in great haste to land," said Becket, "but, before you have been forty days in England, any other country in the world will seem preferable to you." Resigned as he was to death, he believed it more prudent to

[1] Panegyric of St Thomas of Canterbury. Exorde.

avoid landing at Dover. He therefore had the vessel steered to the north-west, to the little bay of Sandwich, which he reached in the morning, and from whence, six years previously, almost at the same date, he had embarked for France.

CHAPTER VII

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO CANTERBURY—MARTYRDOM—EPILOGUE

1170

AS soon as the vessel which was bearing St Thomas arrived in sight of Sandwich, the primatial cross was set up on her deck. It was seen from the shore, and the news of his return, so long and so impatiently desired, at once spread like lightning in the town and its neighbourhood. The inhabitants were not only his diocesans, but his vassals, Sandwich and its territory being the property of the See of Canterbury. The shore was soon covered by an eager crowd, while the air was rent with their joyful cries and shouts; men were seen plunging into the sea to meet the vessel, to aid the Primate to land, and to be among the first to receive his benediction.

Becket only stayed long enough to thank these good people for their welcome, to bless them and distribute alms, and then he immediately set out for Canterbury, where he arrived before sunset. The journey from Sandwich to the Archiepiscopal city was performed in the midst of an uninterrupted ovation. From every village on the road intermin-

able processions came to meet the Archbishop, led by the Vicars, and preceded by the Cross, while from every steeple resounded a merry carillon. On entering Canterbury, he found the streets decorated, and all the inhabitants astir, the workmen and small shopkeepers in festive array. The bells were pealing forth from all the churches, and before the Palace, drums were beating noisily at the approach of the Primate and of his train. He repaired first of all to the Cathedral, where an immense crowd was awaiting him, which restrained its emotion with difficulty, and he could hardly pass through its serried ranks in order to seat himself in the Primatial Chair at the foot of the apse. There, he gave the kiss of peace to all the monks of the Chapter, whilst the entire congregation joined the choir in chanting the Te Deum and the Benedictus. The vaults of the immense Cathedral were resounding with the hymn of victory, when Herbert de Bosham, approaching his master, said in a low voice, "What does it matter now what the future has in store for you? To-day the Church has triumphed." The Archbishop only responded by a sad and penetrating look, as if he would say that this joyful day would perhaps have a sad morrow.

Indeed, the very next day, he was once more in conflict with his enemies. Several of the king's officers came to see him on behalf of the Archbishop of York, and the Bishops of London and Salisbury. These prelates had been at Dover for some time past with the knights and soldiers, already mentioned, and thinking that Becket would land in this

port, they had been awaiting his arrival that they might at once do him harm. Their plans being frustrated, the three Bishops decided to send a deputation to Canterbury, with the design of intimidating Becket, and extorting from him by force that which they could not hope to obtain willingly. At the Primate's request, they had recently been suspended and excommunicated by the Sovereign Pontiff, for having taken part in the coronation of the young King Henry Curtmantle. It was now their object to compel the Archbishop to absolve them, and they expected to succeed, thanks to the violence of their messengers, among whom one remarked Becket's implacable enemy, Raoul de Broc, who was then living at the Castle of Saltwood, some miles from Canterbury. His domain was one of those which had been taken away from the Primatial See, and consequently Raoul joined to his long-standing aversion the natural hostility of one who is unjustly withholding the property of another, especially if he knows that other capable of reclaiming it, and perhaps of obtaining its restitution. Thus the deputies of the three Bishops did not spare either threats or insults in order to move the Archbishop. But he remained inflexible, saying that their sentence had been pronounced by the Pope, and could only be revoked by him. At the same time, in the interests of peace and out of consideration for the king, he offered to consult several Bishops, among others the Bishop of Winchester, and to advise with them what measures of clemency could be employed with regard to the

censured prelates, but only on condition that they made an act of repentance and submission, and that it would be in no way detrimental to the rights of the Roman Pontiff. The knights then retired, saying that they would deliver this answer to the Bishops, of whom they were the interpreters, adding that if through the Primate's fault their negotiations were unsuccessful, their master, the king, might resolve on a step which would strike the whole world with stupor.

This scene was but the prelude of all the bitter outrages and insults to which the holy Archbishop was forced to submit while awaiting the supreme attempt on his life, now so near, which had been prophesied by Godric, and foreseen by him who was to be its victim.

Becket had been a week at Canterbury, when he thought he could no longer defer going to greet the young king Henry, his former pupil, for whom he had always entertained a paternal affection. He knew they had maligned him to the young prince, and had made him believe, that in protesting against his coronation, on account of the irregularities which had attended it, the Primate had meant to take away his crown and prevent him from succeeding his father. He therefore did not think it prudent to present himself at Winchester where Prince Henry was then residing, before knowing what his sentiments were, and being assured that he would consent to receive him. From London, at which place he stopped, and where the nobles and the people gave him a welcome which by its eagerness and en-

thusiasm recalled that of his own diocesans at Sandwich and Canterbury, he sent to Winchester. He had chosen for this mission, Richard, the Prior of St Martin's at Dover, who was well known to the young prince, and much liked by him. Richard was to be the bearer of a letter from the Archbishop to Henry, and to offer him three superb chargers, which Becket had brought from Flanders as a present to the young king, and which were remarkable for their beauty and swiftness. Henry opened the letter negligently, hardly glanced at the horses, and dismissed the Prior, saying he would send his answer to the Archbishop by a royal messenger.

The next day, Becket received a visit from Jocelin of Arundel, the Queen's brother, who was charged to bring him a verbal answer from the prince. Henry enjoined him not to continue his journey, but to return as soon as possible to his diocese, and not to leave it again. "Does that mean," asked the Archbishop, "that the young king has withdrawn his confidence from me, and does not wish to see me again?"—"I have only to repeat the order you have just heard," replied Jocelin, sharply, and he withdrew.

On the threshold of the Palace, where Becket was staying, which belonged to the Bishop of Winchester, he met a rich citizen who wished to make a visit to the Primate: "Are you also," he said to him, "coming to see the king's enemy? If you listen to me, you will quickly return home."—"If he is the king's enemy," replied the visitor, "we are ignorant of it; for we were told—and we believed it—that they were

reconciled, and nothing has so far made us suppose otherwise."

But this illusion was soon no longer possible, and similar incidents were only too well calculated to open the eyes of the least clear-sighted. It became more and more manifest that Becket had gained nothing by crossing the Channel, and that the pretended reconciliation at Fréteval, while putting an end to his exile, had not changed the sentence of proscription which had weighed upon him for nearly eight years, and which made him an outlaw in his own country. Nearly every day some new fact showed this in a clearer light, and every heart was filled with the most glooming forebodings. Sometimes it was an event quite unimportant in itself, but of such a nature as to make a vivid impression on the popular imagination. On the evening of his arrival in London, the Primate had been conducted in procession to St Mary's Church in Southwark, where he was received with great pomp by the Canons Regular, who officiated in this sanctuary in which a Te Deum was being sung in his honour. In the middle of the ceremony a harsh voice was suddenly raised that interrupted the liturgical chants and disturbed the congregation. It was a poor mad woman, fond of assisting at all public reunions, who twice exclaimed: "Archbishop, beware of the knife!"

But what must have above all alarmed Becket's partisans was the growing insolence of his enemies, which really exceeded all bounds. Among the authors or chief instigators of the blows then directed

against the Primate or against his servants and his goods, we find Raoul de Broc, whom we already know, and his brother Robert, an apostate monk, who scandalized the least timorous minds by his licence and impiety. One day, the latter concealed by the side of the road, stopped a train of sumpter-horses belonging to the Archbishop, and had the tail of one cut off, which was at once taken bleeding and multilated before St Thomas. To the Archbishop the material damage mattered far less than the insult, which, according to the ideas of that age, was addressed directly to his person; for the horse was then considered his master's valued servant, companion and helper in the work and combats of every day. Another time, the two brothers were seen coming by daylight, and with a great deal of noise, to hunt over the lands and forest of the Archbishop, and after chasing the deer with Becket's hounds they went home with his dogs as well as his game. This again was also a great insult according to the manners and customs of the time. Since the Norman conquest, the right to hunt had been one of the privileges of the English nobles, and one of which they were the most proud and tenacious. Certainly Thomas à Becket, who was then preparing for his martyrdom, had no thought of engaging in an exercise of which he had been passionately fond in his youth; but his enemies in thus insolently braving him on his own domains, inflicted on him an affront, and treated him like one who had forfeited his seigneurial rights, and was under the ban of society. And again, Raoul, having learnt that a

vessel was arriving from Normandy with a great cargo of wine addressed to the Palace at Canterbury, resolved on seizing it, and as the crew showed some resistance, he killed three of the sailors and imprisoned the rest in his castle. Becket had treated the other outrages of which we have spoken with disdain, this time as it was a question of the life and liberty of his servants, he sent the Prior of Dover to the young king to protest against these robberies, and to demand reparation. The vessel and cargo were restored to their lawful owner, and the prisoners set at liberty; but the murder of the sailors remained unpunished.

However, since his return to Canterbury, directly after being refused access to the palace of the young prince, his former pupil, Thomas à Becket seemed to be entirely occupied with the administration of his diocese, and the care of his flock. He was very assiduous in his attendance at the offices in his Cathedral. On Christmas Eve, he presided at Matins, and afterwards celebrated the Midnight Mass. On the morning of the Feast he again sang solemn Mass, and pronounced a homily on the text, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth, peace to men of good will." On such a subject and at such a moment, allusions naturally suggested themselves. After recalling the memory of the Saints who had rendered the Church of Canterbury illustrious; "You have had," said Thomas, "one Martyr Pontiff, Archbishop Saint Elphege, and perhaps you will have another." The worshippers who crowded the cathedral only too readily understood, and for

several minutes nothing but sighs and stifled sobs were to be heard.

At the same hour in which Thomas à Becket thus announced his approaching death to his people, it had been resolved upon in a castle in Normandy, and the murderers had just taken counsel together as to the means of executing their crime. When three weeks before, Raoul de Broc had brought back to the Bishops of York, London and Salisbury, Becket's answer to their demands to be freed from the censures they had incurred, these prelates, furious at their defeat, decided to go and see Henry, who was on the Continent, and put their cause into his hands. They therefore proceeded to the castle of Bur, near Bayeux, where the king received them in audience surrounded by his Court, on Thursday, the Eve of Christmas. With truly infernal perfidy, Roger de Pont l'Evêque explained the facts in such a manner as to distort the Primate's intentions, and represent him as an enemy to Henry II. and his son, both of whom he wished to dethrone. He declared that Becket had only returned to England to carry fire and sword there, and was everywhere to be met surrounded by an army, with which he was trying to seize the fortresses and castles of the land. This last calumny originated in the fact that on his recent journey to London, Becket seeing himself exposed to continual annoyance from the de Broc brothers, had been accompanied by a sergeant-at-arms and four horsemen as an escort, whom he had been careful to dismiss on his return to Canterbury, though as Archbishop, he had the right to

maintain a military household, like all the other prelates of the realm, as he himself had done before his exile without anyone finding it amiss. Coming at length to the censures which had been pronounced on him and his two colleagues, Roger spoke in such a way that the king might well believe himself excommunicated. The latter could no longer contain himself, and a prey to one of those terrible paroxysms of rage to which he was only too subject: "Cowards and felons," he cried, fixing his flaming eyes on the bystanders, "here is a man who came to my court without a farthing: I have loaded him with honours and wealth, and to-day he sets himself up against me and my heirs, and wishes to despoil me. Is there not one among you who eat at my table and live by my bounty who will avenge my honour and rid me of this turbulent priest?" Imprudent words, it has been said, which the Archbishop's enemies, prompted by their personal hatred, took as an order to kill him. Criminal words we say, which were the death-warrant, intended and premeditated, of the holy and intrepid champion of the Church and the Papacy. One has only to compare them with others already quoted, which the king had so often pronounced and notably at Northampton, and at Chinon, and each time with a more bitter and imperious accent; one cannot fail to recognize in them the cry of a heart, possessed by the demon of hatred and vengeance, which had long thirsted for his enemy's blood. Thus we see this blood marking the hands of Henry Plantagenet with as indelible a trace as that which Shakespeare's

heroine cannot succeed in washing away from her "little hand," whose scent pursues her everywhere, and would resist all the "perfumes of Arabia."[1]

He had however an accomplice, who shares with him the responsibility of the crime, and whom historians must involve in the same reprobation. This is the unworthy Archbishop of York, Roger de Pont l'Evêque. We have just seen him deliberately provoke that access of rage, in the midst of which Henry made use of the fatal words which armed the assassins of Becket. On leaving the King's audience, he shut himself up in one of the chambers in the Castle of Bur with four knights of the Court: Renaud, fils d'Ours, Guillaume de Tracy, Hugues de Moreville and Richard Le Breton. He commenced by proving, which was easy, they being convinced beforehand, that the murder of the Primate was the only means of restoring tranquillity to the monarch, who wished to be rid of him at any price, and also peace to England, unsettled by this restless and turbulent spirit. Then he concerted long with them on the measures to be taken, the more surely to accomplish their ends. When all was decided, he gave each one sixty marks, and at his request the knights promised by oath to use them for the best; and, according to the programme which they had just arranged together, to rid the king of an adversary he detested, and Roger himself of a rival whom for twenty-five years he had held in abhorrence. Thus it was they spent their Christmas Eve, while St Thomas was celebrating in his

[1] *Macbeth*, Act v. 1.

Cathedral the anniversary of the Saviour's Birth, and praying at the foot of the crib for his persecutors.[1] At day-break the four conspirators left the castle and hastened to the sea-coast, there to wait for a favourable opportunity of secretly passing over to England. It was agreed tkat the moment they landed they should go to see Raoul de Broc at Saltwood.

They arrived on Monday, the 28th of December, and had no trouble in obtaining Raoul's approbation and aid for their plans. Without losing any time, the latter ordered the soldiers at Saltwood and those of the neighbouring castles to be ready to march. Then he withdrew to a room remote from his manor, and there in the company of his guests by the solitary flame on the hearth, held a council which lasted nearly all night, and which only too much resembled the one held at Bur; for the same subjects were discussed; at the same hour and by the same interlocutors, except Roger de Pont l'Evêque, who was however worthily represented by Raoul de Broc.

[1] Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence is the only one of all the authors of this period who speaks of this *conciliabule* (Vie de S. Thomas le Martyr, ed. Hippeaux, p. 179). But he was the contemporary and often the occular witness of the facts which he relates. Besides the rôle which he attributes to Roger de Pont l'Evêque only too well agrees with the opinions which his colleagues in the Episcopate seem to have entertained of him after the Primate's murder; especially when, in a Council held shortly after the tragedy of Canterbury, they greeted him with these words, "Away with you! Thy hands still smell of the Martyr's blood!" (See Vie de S. Thomas de Canterbury by the R. P. Dom l'Huillier, t. ii., Appendice, note A., p. 526 *et sq.*)

At that very moment, another meeting was taking place at Canterbury. However great the mystery with which the conspirators had surrounded themselves, they had not been able to prevent something transpiring of their arrival in England and of their visit to the Lord of Saltwood. Besides the unusual movement of troops had, for two days past, awakened public attention in the usually peaceful neighbourhood of Canterbury. It was known that they were there in accordance with orders which a Royal Commissioner, Richard de Homet, Constable of Normandy, had just brought from the Castle of Bur. Why had he crossed the Channel? Historians have said that he was charged to examine into the suit of Thomas à Becket; but had not this suit long since been investigated? Besides when the Constable had left Henry's Court on Christmas Eve, one could not have been ignorant of the departure of the four knights, personages of note, whose absence would not long remain unperceived. Then, too, it had not been difficult to guess the motive and object of their journey. No one has ever thought of saying that Richard had followed them in order to prevent the execution of their plot; would it then be too rash to suppose that his real mission was to assist them in their undertaking? Whatever may be the case, the presence of all these men-at-arms, who filled the metropolitan city, and had been for the most part taken from the garrison at the royal Castle of Winchester, the residence of Prince Henry, could not but render the Primate's episcopal

family very uneasy. On Monday evening one of the soldiers, meeting a cellarer in the service of the Monks of Trinity, had said to him: "Your master will not see the end of the day, to-morrow." Becket's clerks and the monks of the Cathedral asked to be allowed to watch near him on the night of the 28th to the 29th of December. He first of all recited Matins with them. A conversation followed the psalmody of the office, one full of sadness and abandonment, showing on one side the alarms of most of the speakers, and the tender attachment of all of them, to their master; and on the other the calm resignation of the Saint to every event, and his anxious affection for his friends. All at once St Thomas rose, went and opened the window, and remained there for some moments silent, his gaze as if lost in the night, then suddenly he turned and asked what the hour was: "Would it be possible," he added, evidently thinking of those who surrounded him, rather than himself, "to reach Sandwich before day-break?"—"Certainly," some one answered at once, "and it is even not too late to go much farther." But the Archbishop had already reseated himself in the midst of his companions, and as if he had not listened to the answer just given, they heard him utter these words half audibly: "It will be as God wills; it is here, in the Church of which I am the Head, that I ought to await the fate reserved for me."

A little later he retired to take a few moments' rest, and in the morning descended early to the Cathedral to hear Mass. He afterwards, according

to his custom, went and knelt in turn at the foot of all the altars in the Cathedral, recommending himself to the Saints to which they were dedicated, and breathing fervent prayers before their different shrines and tombs. After this, he entered the Chapter House, and for some moments engaged in pious conversation with the Monks. Then, taking one of them aside, he begged him to hear his confession; this was Thomas of Maidstone, a man venerated for his wisdom and sanctity.

It being then the hour of dinner he sat down to table as usual in the midst of the religious and those of his household. The meal was, however, by his order, rather shortened. He wished to be ready to receive his murderers, and one would have said that by a special revelation he knew they were approaching, and would in an instant be before him.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, the four conspirators, guided by Raoul and Robert de Broc, and followed by some of the soldiers, whose assistance they had procured the day before, entered by the gates, then wide-open, of the Archbishop's dwelling. Some moments later, they penetrated into the room where Thomas à Becket was, and without any salutation and without words they sat down in front of him. As the silence was prolonged, and the miserable men began to appear embarrassed at their rôle, the Archbishop was charitable enough to address a word of greeting to them. They looked at each other, and Renaud, fils d'Ours, speaking for all, said: "*Dieu t'aide*" (God help thee). This was the formula which was used to inferiors. The

colour mounted to the Primate's face. But he controlled himself. "We bring you," continued Renaud, "orders, which, from the other side of the Channel, our master enjoined us to deliver to you. Will you listen to them in private or in public?"—"As you please," answered Thomas.—"No," added Renaud, "it is for you to decide." To put an end to this the Archbishop signed to his clerks to retire. But he had scarcely heard the first words of the communication that they had to make to him, than he changed his mind, and called back all those of his household, saying: "These are things which must be explained before witnesses and not in secret." Among the number of those, who at once returned to take their place near their master the Archbishop, were John of Salisbury, Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, Robert of Merton and a young clerk Edward Grim, who had lately been attached to the person of the Primate, and who had the honour of being the last to remain by his side at the moment of his martyrdom.[1] In their presence, Renaud again began his discourse, "The king," said he to Becket, "signed a peace with you. Forgetting all his wrongs, he permitted you to return to England, and to once more take possession of your see. And now you are adding fresh insults to your former outrages. You are violating the treaty, and as regards your sovereign, you are abusing it with an insolence that will cause your ruin.

[1] We must not be surprised at not finding in this list the faithful Herbert of Bosham; Becket had sent him some days previously to France that he might give Louis le Jeune an account of what was taking place in England.

You suspend all those who have taken part in young Henry's coronation; you anathematize the counsellors whose devotion and experience help the monarch to discharge his onerous duties. If you could, you would take away the crown from the young king; you would dethrone his father; for it is only too easy to see where your plots and intrigues are tending. We come then in the name of, and on behalf of our master, to order you to absolve those you have excommunicated, and afterwards go to Winchester to render an account of your actions to the prince and to submit to his sentence."

Violent and injurious as Renaud had been in his attacks, all the more calm and moderate was the Archbishop's reply, which was full however of nobility and dignity. "I take God to witness," said he, "that I have never dreamt of raising my hand either against the young king's crown or that of his father; if it were in my power to put new ones on their brows, and to add vast domains to those they already possess, I would willingly do so. I am also ready to justify my conduct to my young sovereign, but since he bade me retrace my steps at the moment when I was going to present myself before him, I must wait until he summons me. As to those Bishops who are suspended or excommunicated, it is not I that have punished them, but the Pope."—"Yes," interrupted his listeners violently, "but it was at your request, and through your ministry."—"I do not deny it, but still it is not I who can unloose that which Our Lord the Pope has bound. Besides, independently of the rigorous measures of which you complain, those

whose cause you are trying to plead have merited other penalties still, for since my return, I have been continually harassed."—"Why did you not demand justice from the king," cried Moreville; "the question would then have been brought before the Great Council and your rights recognized."—"Gently, Sire Hugues; do you think then that on every occasion I shall be seen appealing to the Royal Council? Whoever offends the Church will find me in his path, and I shall use my rights, as Archbishop, without waiting for anyone's permission."—"What are you saying?" exclaimed all the four conspirators, rising; "but from whom then do you hold your archbishopric?"—"Its spiritualities from God and the Pope, its temporalities from the king."—"What, is it not the king who has given you everything?"—"By no means," answered Thomas, "and I must render to God what belongs to God, and to the king what belongs to the king." At these words the Normans were very angry, said the distinction was too subtle, and made several impatient movements, twisting the gloves they held in their hands. "Since it is thus," said they, "we order you and yours in the king's name to leave his realm and domains, for there is no more peace for you or for them in your master's estates, because you have violated the treaty you concluded with him."—"A truce to threats," replied the Pontiff; "my confidence is in the King of Heaven who suffered on the Cross for His people. The ocean shall not separate me from my Church. It is already too much to have been once expatriated; I shall not recommence. I have not come

back again to flee; he who seeks me will find me here."—"We tell you plainly that your words will fall on your own head," they replied brutally.—"Have you come to kill me?" then asked Thomas. "I have put my cause into the hands of the Sovereign Judge. You are not more ready to strike me with your sword than I am to suffer martyrdom. Seek for him who flees from you, as for me I shall fight the battle of the Lord to the end, and your threats will not make me draw back."—"Then we will do more than threaten you," answered Renaud, fils d'Ours, going towards the door, followed by the others, who were crying "To arms!" On passing before a group of the Religious and the servants of the Archbishop, who were waiting near the entrance of the hall, "Sir Monks," he cried, "in the name of the king, keep this man under strict surveillance until full justice be done to his person." St Thomas heard them: "It will be easy to guard me," said he quietly, "for I am quite decided not to flee."

Hardly had the conspirators departed than a lively discussion arose between the Primate's followers. Most of them listening only too readily to the counsels of human prudence would have liked St Thomas to try and come to some arrangement with the knights. John of Salisbury, the oldest among them, whose age and the intimacy of his relations with the Archbishop gave him the privilege of a greater freedom of speech, did not fear to say impetuously: "Only see how faithful you are to your usual custom, you speak, but do not act."—"What then?" answered Becket, "what is the matter, Master

John?"—"You ought to assemble your Council. Do you not see that these soldiers only wish for one thing, that is an opportunity of killing you?"—"We must all die," replied the Saint, "and we should not, through fear of death, fail in our duty; for myself, I repeat it, if these men are ready to put me to death, I am still more willing to meet it, for the honour of God, for justice, and for the liberty of the Church."—"But we," said John, "are sinners, and little disposed to die, and I see no one here but yourself, who wishes to lose his life gratuitously." The Archbishop interrupted him, saying: "May God's will be done!"

He had not finished speaking, when a violent tumult, accompanied by the noise of axes and hammers, resounded in the courtyard of the palace. It was the conspirators who had just taken their arms, and were trying to beat down the doors which had been closed behind them. The clerks and monks begged St Thomas to take refuge in the church which communicated by a cloister with his apartments. "They will not dare," they assured him, "pursue you, and will scruple to shed blood there."—"No," answered the Archbishop, who, according to a witness, "appeared so calm and smiling that one would have thought he was invited to a marriage rather than to a violent death."[1]—"No, I promised to wait for them here: I will remain." One of the assistants observed that the hour for Vespers had rung, and that one could already hear the monks chanting in the cathedral. "Since it is

[1] Edward Grim, ap. Migne, col. 44.

the hour for my office, I shall go to the church," then replied Thomas, and preceded by his cross, he slowly entered the cloister, walking last, remarks a chronicler, "like a pastor with his flock, and from time to time glancing backwards, partly to see if the king's men were pursuing him, but especially to assure himself that no one was there to close the door and prevent them from entering."[1] On arriving at the threshold of the north transept of the church which led out of the cloister he had just traversed, he stopped and hesitated to go forward, fearing that the respect of that sacred spot might stay the murderers' hands, and thus deprive him of the object of his most cherished desires. They were obliged to drag him along by force, and almost carry him into the middle of the transept.

As soon as they saw him in the church the monks thought it best to shut the door of the cloister, and to fasten it with an iron bar. He noticed it, and turning towards them: "Back, cowards!" he cried. "Will you make the church a fortress? In the name of your vow of obedience, we forbid you to close this door." And he himself took away the iron bar and re-opened it. He then went towards the choir, and ascended the first steps. At the same moment the clashing of arms, and loud and threatening voices and cries of death, were heard at the entrance to the cloister. The conspirators now rushed tumultuously into the church by the way that the Archbishop had taken, having slipped in after him. They were now in the transept.

[1] Guillaume, fils d'Etienne, *ibid.*, col. 183.

Becket could still have escaped, either by seeking refuge in the crypt which would have offered him a sure retreat, or by ascending a hidden staircase, which, with many windings, unknown to the knights, led to the summit of the cathedral. But in spite of the supplications of those around him, he would not take either of these means of safety. He remained motionless, leaning against a pillar which separated the transept from the great nave, between the altar of the Blessed Virgin and that of Saint Benedict. The conspirators advanced: "Where is the traitor?" cried Renaud, fils d'Ours; for it was already night, and this hindered him from recognizing the saint. No one answered. "Where is the Archbishop?" began Renaud again.—"Here am I," then said Becket, "but there is no traitor here. Why have you come with arms into the house of God? What is your purpose?"—"That you die!" "I am ready to die for God. May my blood give the Church liberty and peace! But I forbid you, in the name of the Almighty, to touch any of my companions, cleric or lay, old or young."

At these words, the four knights threw themselves together upon the Archbishop, and strove to drag him out of the Church. One even struck him with the flat side of his sword, between his shoulders, saying, "Flee, or thou diest!" They still hesitated to kill him at the foot of the altar. But St Thomas forced them back and declared that he would not go, and would compel them to execute their intentions or orders on the spot.

Seeing the hour approaching which was to be the

last of his earthly life, and to put him in possession of the crown of immortality, this invincible champion bowed his head, joined his hands in the attitude of the priest at the altar, and recommended his cause and that of the Church of God to the Virgin Mary, and "to the martyr St Denys, *patron de la douce France*."[1] He sought for aid from heaven; for those on earth had nearly all abandoned him. His clerks and all the monks had fled; only Edward Grim remained, and held him closely embraced, until the moment when the martyr received his first wound.

Several times when he had spoken of the death which was reserved for him, St Thomas had clearly pointed out the place on his body, at which the assassins would aim. Putting his hand to his forehead, and then by a familiar gesture passing it over his tonsure: "It is there," he said, "that they will touch me." He was not mistaken.

The first blow was aimed by William de Tracy, whose sword slightly wounded Becket on the head, but glancing aside it struck Edward Grim, whose arm was almost severed. Renaud, fils d'Ours followed, and with a furious blow from the edge of his sword gave the Primate a deep wound on the same spot where Tracy had already struck him. Becket, however, still remained upright, leaning against the column and praying silently. A third and a fourth blow followed, the last one being dealt with such violence that the blade broke, and he was thrown first on his knees and at length stretched

[1] Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, p. 194.

on the ground: the blood flowed in torrents from the gaping wound; the large tonsure was nearly detached from his skull. The saint gave no farther sign of life; but he had been heard to murmur before drawing his last breath: "I die willingly for the name of Jesus, and the defence of His Church." His murderers could no longer make him suffer, but they could still vent their fury on his corpse. As if it were necessary that a fourth wound should complete the likeness which the holy martyr bore in his flesh to the Christ he had so well imitated, a sub-deacon, who had accompanied the conspirators, and whose surname of Mauclerc showed plainly enough the contempt with which he was regarded, put his foot on the neck of the saintly victim, and plunging his sword into the half opened skull scattered the brains on the pavement, saying: "Let us go now, knights; this time he is really dead and cannot return."

Thus perished St Thomas à Becket the 29th of December 1170, in the fifty-third year of his age, and the ninth of an episcopate, two thirds of which were spent in exile.

In his immortal panegyric Bossuet, after having shown us how St Thomas resembled the King of Martyrs, by his successive falls into disgrace, proscription, exile and death, also shows him rising, as it were, in his turn, glorious and triumphant from the tomb, and ascending in one instant by the admiration and worship of his contemporaries while awaiting the suffrages of posterity, to the highest rank, to that of the Saints themselves,

and as one has said later, *se trouvant tout d'un coup grandi de Cantorbery jusqu'au Ciel.*" [1]

Scarcely had the news spread that Becket had succumbed to the blows of the four assassins, than the cathedral was invaded by the people who rushed there from all sides uttering cries of indignation and horror. While the crime was being perpetrated, the faithful had assembled in great numbers in the nave of the church, and had several times endeavoured to climb the steps which led to the transept to go to the aid of the Archbishop. They had been beaten back by the murderers. These had now quitted the cathedral, and were plundering the primatial palace. The crowd were then free to penetrate to the spot where the martyr lay inanimate in the midst of the monks and his weeping household. One then saw a moving spectacle: all these men and women, in the semi-obscurity of the immense edifice which was lighted only by a few torches, kneeling by turns before this corpse from which death had robbed nothing of its calm majesty. One saw them take cloths, and dip them piously in the blood of this Confessor of the Faith, then carry them away as precious relics; while their groans were only interrupted by this invocation, which soon resounded from one end of the Cathedral to the other: "Saint Thomas! Saint Thomas!" Thus just at the moment when the Archbishop had expired, the people already canonized him without waiting for the decision of the supreme authority, and thus inaugurated his

[1] Michelet, "Histoire de France," ch. v.

worship under the precise form which characterized it during nearly four centuries. It was, indeed, to his blood shed in the most sacred of causes that popular devotion attached itself in a special manner. The least fragment of stuff imbibed with it, or a little water in which a drop had been mingled, were counted as inestimable relics, for which each one eagerly contended, and which worked miracles, whose recital flew from mouth to mouth, so much so, that the day after his death St Thomas à Becket already had his legend.

It is not that his enemies did not strive to stifle, in their birth, this pious enthusiasm and devout confidence, which so openly condemned their crime. An edict, published with sound of trumpet, forbade all the citizens of Canterbury, and all the subjects of the King of England, to give Thomas à Becket the title of martyr. On the very morning of the crime, before dawn, Robert de Broc went to the monks of the cathedral and gave them from his worthy brother a message thus conceived, "Thomas has perished by a traitor's death, and the earth is now rid of him. He does not deserve to be better treated dead than when alive. Take away his corpse then at once, and throw it in some spot where nobody will ever find it again. If not, I will come and take it away, and fasten it ignominously to the tails of horses: it will be dragged thus through the streets of the town, and after having been torn to pieces will be thrown to dogs and swine." Those who uttered these odious threats were, as one knows, ready to put them in execution. Already

during the night, groups of soldiers had been seen wandering about near the cathedral as if they sought to enter it by surprise and take away the body of the holy martyr. The Monks hastened to enter it, and shelter it from the profanations, which were only too much to be feared on the part of his stubborn enemies, whose implacable hatred pursued him even after death.

There was at this time, in the crypt of the Cathedral, a marble sarcophagus: it was empty, and had never been used. In this were laid the precious remains of the great Archbishop, without any witnesses, and with the doors of the Cathedral carefully closed. They did not even take the time either to wash or embalm the corpse, which was only clothed in the episcopal vestments, and lowered into a vault dug out behind the chapel of the Virgin, called "Our Lady of the Crypt," beside the altars of St John the Baptist and St Augustine of Canterbury. No liturgical chant, no prayer was to be heard; but while thus hastily and secretly burying him, who was deserving of a royal funeral, the monks of Trinity twice experienced a profound and religious emotion. When they had taken off his outer garments to replace them by the insignia of his office, these Religious saw with the rough hair-cloth with which he was covered, the Cistercian habit which he had received at Pontigny from the hands of Pope Alexander, and which he had worn ever since under his Archbishop's robes. This double proof of his spirit of penitence and humility touched them to tears: "See," they exclaimed, "he was a Monk, and

we did not know it!" And prostrating themselves they devoutly kissed his hands and feet, repeating: "Saint Thomas, glorious martyr of God!" as if they wished to make some reparation, for not having in his lifetime, always valued and honoured him as his merit and virtues deserved. They experienced a not less vivid impression when the sarcophagus was about to be lowered into the vault where it was to lie concealed for nearly half a century: the Pontiff appeared to them as if transfigured. His features bore no traces of change; his eyes and lips, gently closed, breathed a heavenly peace; the blood from his wounds being congealed formed a crown like rubies around his brow. He seemed to be sleeping, and the only sign of his violent death was a thin trace of blood which ran across his face from the right temple to the opposite side of the cheek. On seeing him thus, one could not help thinking of the Holy Face of the Saviour. This image was profoundly engraved in the memory of those who had taken part in this scene worthy of the catacombs. They soon learnt that in many parts of Christendom and even in the far East where the mother of the Saint was born, he had appeared in a dream, under these traits and with this red scar dividing, as it were, his face in two, to persons who could not have been witnesses, and had not even heard of the secret burial on the 30th of December.

When all was finished, the monks quitted the crypt after having solidly barricaded the doors. They also left the Cathedral, which, profaned by the sacrilege of which it had been the scene, could only be

reconciled by order and delegation of the Sovereign Pontiff. In the meantime its vaults would remain mute, and its precincts deserted; was silence then, according to the vow of his enemies, to reign around his tomb?

God did not permit this. Almost every day some fresh miracle occurred to witness to the credit which St Thomas enjoyed in heaven, and to increase the number of pious clients, who, on earth, had recourse to his intercession, and placed themselves under his patronage. "The more," wrote John of Salisbury some years later, "that men in their temerity endeavour to obscure the glory of the holy Martyr, the more God causes it to shine forth by the lustre of his miracles. His enemies tried to hinder these wonders from being spoken of; but they did not succeed in extinguishing the light illumined by God Himself. These marvels take place in broad daylight, and no one is able to deny or to keep silence about them. The blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, the paralytic, the fever-stricken, the lepers are healed, the demons abandon those whom they tormented and caused to blaspheme, and lastly, that which has not been seen since the days of old, the dead rise again."

Very soon, moreover, full liberty was to be rendered by the king himself to those who wished to show their veneration for the new martyr. In the beginning of year 1171, a royal message arrived at Canterbury which contained a formal repudiation of the threats and prohibitions of the brothers de Broc, and which allowed the guardians of Becket's tomb to

relax their precautions, and the people to publicly manifest their sentiments, towards one, whose sanctity, even his persecutors themselves no longer dared to contest. This message, which for its contemporaries had the happy effect we have just noticed, has besides the merit of aiding us to perceive the real sentiments of Henry II. at the moment when he was informed of the Archbishop's murder. It is often difficult to guess what passes in a soul, especially one so complicated and false as was Henry Plantagenet's. At the first news of the crime, he appeared quite overwhelmed; shutting himself up in his apartments, he remained alone in them for three days, without receiving anybody, neither appearing abroad, nor entering the sanctuary, and without taking any nourishment but a little milk of almonds. It was added that he did not cease to groan and protest, as he afterwards did several times in public and on oath, that he had never ordered nor desired Becket's death. How can we reconcile this assertion with the many heavy charges it is easy to produce against him? What one may admit is, that he was alarmed at the circumstances which had accompanied the assassination, and which he well understood would excite universal reprobation, the heaviest part of which would fall upon him. The place where the crime was accomplished rendered it doubly sacrilegious; the great haste with which the murderers had executed their design, too plainly suggested that the king had only opened the gates of England to Becket, in order to spread a snare for him, and to strike him down more surely.

Henry was then, in a certain sense, sincere, when he disavowed the four conspirators whose imprudence and haste he most certainly regretted. But was he equally so when he appeared to reprove the murder in itself, and when he affirmed that he had never desired nor willingly provoked it. How can we believe him after all we have already said? How believe him, when we see that the murderers and their accomplices remained unpunished, never having been, in any way, disturbed or pursued for their crime? And lastly, how can we believe him if we notice the terms of the message, of which we have just spoken, that the monks of Canterbury received at the beginning of 1171?

In it the king first complacently recalled his grievances against Thomas à Becket. Then he declared that he did not wish to be severe nor pursue after his death one who, while living, showed himself his enemy. Far from that he forgave this soul all the wrongs it had committed towards him, and desired to forget the injuries he had received. "Give him then," he added, "an honourable sepulture, and let him rest in peace beside his predecessors." One is not only shocked on reading this letter, at the persistent way in which Henry continued to accuse a vanquished and prostrate foe, whose tomb has hardly closed over him, and towards whom he pretends to show himself generous: besides, one cannot help being suspicious. Such language is not only that of an enemy whose resentment outlives his vengeance; in it we believe we also recognize the accent of a troubled conscience, and of one who

seeks to exonerate himself in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of the public, and who finds nothing better, in order to screen himself from the stigma which menaces him, than to try and put the responsibility of the crime on the one who was its victim.

However that may be, this letter from the king put an end to the species of ostracism, to which, owing to the enemies of the martyred Archbishop, his mortal remains had in some measure been condemned. On Friday, April 2nd, in the Octave of Easter, the monks of Trinity re-opened the iron-railings of the cathedral crypt, and at once there was seen a great crowd of the sick and afflicted, of all who needed help, consolation and hope, all those also, whose desire was to testify to their veneration for this noble and valiant champion of the Church, and their attachment to the cause which he defended till death. From this day, we may say, dates the pilgrimage to Canterbury that was soon to rank among the most celebrated and the most frequented in all Christendom, and which was not long before it received, by a solemn act of the Holy See, a fresh and decisive impulse.

On the 21st of February, two years and two months after his death, Thomas à Becket was canonized. The ceremony took place in the Cathedral of Segni, where Alexander celebrated the Mass in honour of the new Saint, with all the pomp of great Papal functions, in presence of the Sacred College, numerous Bishops, and a multitude of clerics and laymen. Some days later, on the 12th of March,

the Pope published the Bull *Redolet Anglia* addressed to the clergy and people of England, in which, after having briefly related the virtues, combats, and heroic death of the Archbishop, he declared that his name would be inscribed on the list of the martyred Saints, and instituted his feast for the 29th of December, the day which was the anniversary of his glorious martyrdom.

From thenceforth, the venerated remains of the Confessor of the Faith might be the object of public worship, and his tomb was visited by crowds of eager votaries. Besides, nothing could now repress their confident and pious transports, for the Cathedral of Canterbury had been solemnly reconciled at the end of 1171, and was at length divested of all the exterior signs of mourning which for nearly a year had rendered it so gloomy. A contemporary has given a vivid picture of the physiognomy which the town and Cathedral of Canterbury presented the day after the canonization: "The glory of the noble martyr," he says, "to-day far surpasses the insults he formerly endured. The towns and villages, the castles and cottages, throughout England are all affected by it, and nearly everyone desires to visit and honour his sepulchre. The same spirit of devotion has attracted thither clerics and laymen, poor and rich, the common people and nobles, fathers and mothers with their children, masters with their servants. On the roads leading to Canterbury, in the hostelries and inns, one constantly sees as eager crowds as on the public market days in the largest cities. By night no less than day, in winter as well as summer, travellers continue to

come, and it even seems that the more severe the season is, the greater the pleasure they find, in accomplishing their pilgrimage." [1]

One day a crowned visitor was seen to arrive, whose coming was to be an event in the posthumous history of Saint Thomas à Becket. In the course of the year 1174, Henry II. found himself in great danger of losing both his possessions on the Continent and the royal crown of England. His sons, at the instigation of their mother Eleanor, and with the aid of the King of France and the Count of Flanders, had revolted against him. The King of Scotland, William the Lion, had declared war, and threatened his estates on the North with a flood of barbarians. The hand of God had never weighed so heavily on the unfortunate prince. In his distress he was heard to suddenly exclaim: "Saint Thomas preserve my kingdom for me!" He who until then had given no convincing proof of sincere repentance; he who for three years seemed to have employed all the resources of his crafty diplomacy to avoid any encounter with the Legates of the Holy See, and to elude every engagement which would have implied a too formal disavowal of the past; he who had, indeed, at length, renounced in word the *customs* of Clarendon, but with reserves and under ambiguous forms, which opened the door to all the ancient abuses of power, he now made a resolve in which it is difficult not to see indication of a sudden conversion operated in his soul and a serious desire to change his conduct and repair the evil he had done. He made a vow to go

[1] Anonyme de Lambeth, ap. Migne, t. cxc. col. 315.

to Canterbury there to humiliate himself on the tomb of him, whom he had so terribly persecuted, and to beg him to obtain his pardon from God and the re-establishment of his fortune. He landed at Southampton, on the 8th of July, after having encountered a fearful tempest, during which he never ceased to pray aloud, demanding of Heaven the favour of arriving safely in port, in order that he might labour to render peace both to the Church and the State. He had hardly landed, when, without a moment's rest, he set out for Canterbury. During the four days that the journey lasted, he fasted on bread and water, and only stopped at the chapels and hospices which he found on the way. As soon as he perceived the Cathedral towers, he dismounted, took off his shoes, put on the coarse habit worn by penitents and pilgrims, and proceeded bare-footed, in the mud, and by a path strewn with pebbles, towards the town, at the entrance of which he was received by a certain number of Bishops, while the population, moved by the example he gave, which surpassed the most eloquent sermon, accompanied him in silence to the porch of the primatial Church. There he fell on his knees, and one could see that his bruised feet had left a long track of blood behind him.

He first proceeded towards the transept where tke Saint had been put to death, knelt down on the flag-stones still stained with the martyr's blood, and kissed them piously while reciting the Confiteor. Then he descended to the crypt and prostrated himself at the foot of the tomb, sobbing and weeping. "It was," said a contemporary, "a spectacle to draw

tears from the eyes of all those present." Then he uncovered his shoulders, and everyone, bishops, abbots, and simple monks, were asked to scourge him with rods. He received the strokes, kneeling, with his head humbly bowed, five blows from the hand of each bishop and three from each of the abbots and monks. "It was," said the same chronicler, "like the flagellation of Christ, with this difference, that one was scourged for our sins, the other for his own." Henry afterwards remained in the crypt and spent the whole night in prayer, always prostrate on the bare ground, without taking either food or drink. On the following morning, he heard a Mass, celebrated at his request, in honour of St Thomas, and left the Cathedral to go to London. He took with him as a precious souvenir of his pilgrimage, a little ampulla rudely fashioned in pewter, which all who went to make their devotions in the Crypt of Canterbury used to suspend at their necks as a talisman and which contained some drops of the martyr's blood mixed with water.

Some days later, while in his capital, Henry learnt that at the very moment when he was hearing Mass near the tomb of St Thomas, the Scotch army had been surprised and cut to pieces, and their king made prisoner. At the news of this unhoped-for victory, his first movement was to exclaim: "Thanks be rendered to God and to St Thomas à Becket!" This time the martyr of Canterbury had decidedly triumphed over the most violent and obstinate of his enemies.

But something was still wanting to his external

and terrestrial glory. At the same time that he published the Bull *Redolet Anglia*, Alexander III. wrote to the monks of the Cathedral of Canterbury to notify to them the canonization of the dead Archbishop, and said: "As it imports that the ashes of the illustrious Pontiff be surrounded by respect and honour, we enjoin you by this Apostolic Rescript to take up his sacred body and carry it through the town in the midst of the clergy and people, with the pious ceremonies of a solemn procession, and place it on the altar, or in a fitting shrine that it may be presented to the veneration of the faithful." Eighteen months had elapsed since then, and the venerated martyr still reposed in the obscurity of the crypt. In the month of September 1174, a fire broke out, which threatened to reduce the whole of the Cathedral to ashes, and necessitated the reconstruction of the choir and a part of the transepts, besides deferring for many years the execution of the Sovereign Pontiff's orders. But this accident which, for one instant threatened the total destruction of the Saint's remains, was to aid in their glorification; for it allowed of the plan of the building being modified and made into the true reliquary of him who had rendered it so celebrated, by attracting to it pilgrims of every nationality. The choir was enlarged in such a manner as to give it unusual proportions, and to allow for room to build behind the High Altar, a kind of second sanctuary destined to receive the shrine of the martyr. Still farther on, at the extremity of the apse, a chapel was opened in the form of a rotunda, which was called St

Thomas à Becket's crown, because it was to contain a relic especially dear to the devotion of the English people. This was a portion of the Archbishop's skull, where one saw the tonsure which had been detached by the sword of the assassins. It was during the first quarter of the thirteenth century on the 7th of July 1220, fifty years after the martyrdom of St Thomas, that a solemn Translation of his relics took place. When they had been placed in the choir and in the chapel in the apse, from these two culminating points of the Cathedral, which were reached by many steps, and which were perceived from all parts of the immense structure, the great Pontiff seemed as if reigning, on high on a double throne, over the whole of England, and presiding over her destinies. This was only justice; in fact, the Church owed to him the preservation of her independence and orthodoxy. By his labours and struggles, by his sufferings and death, he had not only liberated her from servitude to a secular power, he had retarded her divorce from the Holy See for four centuries. Henry VIII. knew this only too well. Thus we see him inaugurate his schism by the profanation of the martyr's remains, and by proscribing all devotion to him. In 1538, in the month of September, three hundred and eighteen years, almost day for day, after the memorable ceremony of the Translation of the relics, the sacred bones became, by the king's order, a prey to the flames. The incomparable reliquaries, loaded with precious stones and enamels, covered with statuettes and encrusted with jewelled designs, whose ex-

quisite and artistic workmanship rivalled the inestimable value of the material, were destroyed in order to be converted into profane ornaments. Henceforth any subject of His Grace was forbidden to give the title of Saint to Thomas à Becket. His name was effaced from the calendar of the Anglican Church; his Feasts were abolished; and pictures of him everywhere destroyed. Anyone preserving a portrait or biography of the great Saint was guilty of high treason. And the case may be cited of a person who forfeited his life, because there was found, in his library, a copy of the history, "full of falsehoods" it was said, of Thomas à Becket.

But that which hatred and tyranny have been powerless to destroy, is the memory of the grand and noble figure, so great in the beauty and consistency of his life. He always remained pure, dignified and faithful to duty in the midst of the most varied circumstances, and in spite of the difference in external behaviour and conduct, which they necessitated. After three centuries of injustice and apparent forgetfulness his compatriots, and even those still remaining in error, seem to have changed their attitude, and if they do not reverence him as a Saint, they at least claim him as one of their greatest glories. It is indeed an honour for a nation to be able to show among her children one such noble and valiant soul, one of so firm and loyal a character, incapable of deserting the good cause and knowing how to sacrifice himself for it. At the same time, let us not forget that he belongs first of all to the Church. It is the Church which

has trained him, and for Her he fought and perished. He was a hero, but a Christian hero; a martyr, but, according to Bossuet, "the first martyr of Catholic discipline." And his eulogy is fitly expressed in these words, that are a faithful summary of his life, which Pope Alexander used with regard to his canonization: *Pro justitia Dei et Ecclesiæ libertate decertavit usque ad mortem.* "He struggled even unto death for the rights of God and the liberty of the Church."

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